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MID FEBRUARY, 1936 EVERY OTHER FRIDAY

WEST

Every Other Friday One Shilling

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RIDIN' DOWN THE RIVER

By Bennett Foster

Ridin' down the river on a sunny afternoon—
(Hope there ain't no cattle in the mud)
Pony's feet a thumpin' to the saddle's creaky tune—
(Greenin' grass an' willows in the bud)
Then a feller's fancy tolls his thoughts away;
Pictures him a cabin of his own.
Woman in the doorway an' some tow head kids at play—
Makes him wish that he was ridin' home.

Ridin' down the river when the snow is on the flat.
(Listen to that hungry dogie bawl.)
Winter clothes an' sheepskin an' a rag around his hat,
(Hear that lonesome coyote lift his call!)
Then a feller's fancy takes the play once more.
He's a fool to wander an' to roam!
Why is he a-ridin'? What's he ridin' for?
Why in hell ain't he a-ridin' home?

Homestead on the river with a little, chinked log shack
(Smoke comes out the chimney risin' slow.)
Fence along the pasture an' a barn out in the back.
(Little bunch of cows that's bound to grow!)
This ain't just a fancy. This is true an' real.
Rooted like a tree in deep, rich loam.
Don't yuh get the picture? Cain't yuh get the feel?
Ridin' down the river—ridin' home!

The Trouble

Even when they were down they fought back to back.

FREDERICK BLAKESLEE

Busters

By

HARRY F. OLMSTED

Old Matt Galagher Dabbed His Twine On The Two Saltiest Trouble-Busters That Ever Forked A Horse—And When He Did, He Looped A Range War That Was Free And Promiscuous

Old Matt Galagher curbed his pony cruelly. His startled eyes bored the willow scrub, searchingly.

"What the hell, hawss!" he murmured, wonderingly. "What kind of Injun screech can that be?"

Palming his Colts, Matt reined carefully into the timber. Breaking through a fringe of willows, he drew rein, staring! Immediately before him were two skinny broncs and a drowsy, mouse-colored pack jack. Yonder, threshing at the cress-bordered margin of the shallow, sluggish stream, were two writhing, battling forms, locked together. Raining blows at one another. Mouthing half-choked curses.

A grim smile broke the seamed severity of Old Matt's face as he sheathed his weapon and unsnapped his rope. Gigging his pony forward, he built a loop, flipped it deftly over the struggling pair as they reared to their knees. Taking his winds

Matt reined his mount about, plied the spurs and dragged the screaming, threshing warriors into the dry. An ominous *crack* and an agonized cry from one of the snared combatants, gave Matt pause. Casting off his dallies, he lit down and darted back.

Two kids, patently between fifteen and sixteen years old, were disentangling themselves from the rope, still swinging wildly at each other. One was tall, an inch or two over six feet, and painfully thin. The other was short and rotund. With a roar, Matt closed with them, forced them apart.

"Hold on there, you two ringy badgers!" he bawled, authoritatively. "What's this hair-liftin' all about?"

"None of yore business!" snarled the tall one. "Tend to yore own knittin' an' lemme at this hammered down runt."

"Yeah!" howled the chunky one. "Git outa my way an' let that drug-out tepee pole come to his needin's. You busted my arm for me but, by Godfrey, I'll bust him with one paw!"

His swinging right fist landed in Old Matt's belly. And as the old cowman doubled in pain, the tall one's swing caught him in the Adam's apple, upsetting him cleanly. More bruised in spirit than in body, Matt bounced up with a clipped curse, collared the two fighting wildcats, bumped their heads together. The stubby one obliged by promptly fainting, his broken left arm flapping grotesquely as he sagged.

Old Matt stared foolishly at the inert weight in his right hand. Recognizing his responsibility, yet hardly knowing what to do about it. The tall one twisted in his grasp, whimpering as he eyed his erstwhile adversary.

"He's hurt," he murmured. "His arm's broke! You done it when you dragged us outa the drink!" And then in a surge of anger: "Don't stand there like a corp', you meddlin' ol' hammerhead! Turn me loose an' dip some water for Chunky!"

The cowman leaped to obey. Finding nothing ludicrous, in that tight moment, about a mature brand owner taking orders from a spindling, bald-faced kid. In a matter of seconds he was back with a hatful of water. Kneeling beside the unconscious, white-faced youngster on the ground. Bathing his face and neck, then looking to the injured arm. It was broken cleanly above the elbow, was quite useless. As Matt worked, the tall kid smoothed the stumpy one's brow, begging him pitifully to come out of it.

Pale and shaken he sat up, staring queerly at his hurt. His eyes mirroring agony. His full-moon face beaded with sweat of pain. But not a sound of suffering passed his tight pressed lips. Sucking a long breath into his lungs, he grinned wanly at the tall kid, then turned his pent-up fury on Old Matt.

"It's all yore doin's!" he cried furiously. "I was dragging grief across Whang's trail when you butted in an' busted my arm. Humph!" He scowled at his sober-faced pardner. "What you laffin' about, feller. When I heal this hurt I'm showin' you what hard times means!"

Humor glinted in Old Matt's eyes. There was "rawhide and gut" toughness to this soft looking youngster. No moaning about his pain. No whining about his ill luck. Only a ranicky blowing off of steam, his only remaining way of fighting.

The kid called Whang was sneering. "Yeah? Well, I can wait . . ."

"Whoa down, you fightin' wildcats!" rapped Old Matt, his puckered eyes emotion filled. "Some feller's gonna have to drive a wedge between you two, an' it looks like I'm elected. Whang, douse the fire in yore eyes an' fork yore pony. Ride to Peralta an' fetch Doc Skinner to the Diamond G Ranch, even if you've gotta hog-tie the old saw-bones. Home place sets over yonder by that round hill. Yeah . . . an' beat Doc's hawss on the tail gettin' out there!"

The slat-built youngster bounced up, hitched his knee-bagged jeans, took a running leap and was afork his startled pony. With a shrill coyote yip, he sank his one disreputable Cross L spur and fogged it toward Peralta at a high lope. When the echoes of his going were dying in the distance, Matt slid his arm tenderly around Chunky's thick body, helped him to his feet. With his Barlow he cut willow withes, split them into rude splints. From his saddle pockets he fetched hoggin' strings of rawhide.

Tenderly, he splinted the arm, bound it tightly. A groan shook Chunky, but otherwise he gave no hint of the torture he was undergoing. When it was over, he asked for a cigarette and Matt built him one. Then he helped him into the saddle.

As they rode, Matt talked his head off to take Chunky's mind off his pain. And succeeded. The kid came back with a fast line of his own. Talk that made the old cowman's eyes sparkle with admiration.

He was from Texas and Whang from "New Mex." His name, he said, was Chunky Blake. His father had been killed by Comanches, down San Saba way. His mother married a brutal cowman, who became poison to Chunky. He ran away at ten. In time he had fallen in with the red-headed piggin'-string known as Whang Shannon, orphaned son of a slow-draw gambler in Socorro.

" . . . best fightin' pardner a man ever had," he boasted. "Never knows when he's licked. I almost give up tryin' to convince him I'm best. But when we team up together . . . boy!"

"Which I don't doubt none," murmured Old Matt, muzzling a smile. "But outside of fightin', what are yuh good for?"

"Good for? Say!" Chunky eyed the cowman pityingly, then launched forth into a description of his prowess that convulsed Old Matt.

"You shore tell it convincin'," chuckled the cowman, tickled. "How about yore pardner? My guess is that he ain't in yore class. That right?"

"No!" exploded the youngster, combatively. "Whang's a jim-dandy. A top hand, and I can lick the man that says different!"

"Jumpin' Judas!" cried Old Matt in mock amazement. "Two tophands, eh? Well, well. If you an' yore pard want to prove yo're not boastin' you've talked yoreself into a ridin' job with my Diamond G. Fifteen a month an' beans! An' more when you earn it!"

"Yo're signin' tough hands, Mister!" grinned Chunky, and from then on gave his whole attention to keeping in the saddle.

Riding slow, Old Matt led the way to the home ranch at the foot of Bull Pine Mountain. He had barely helped the youngster down and gotten a stiff drink into him when the roar of swift traveling hoofs claimed his attention.

Breaking through the willow fringe, thundering across the corduroy bridge and into the ranch yard came two harried ponies. On the lead animal rode a straight-backed man, hands tied behind him, feet lashed to the stirrups. Behind came a spurring boy, yipping like an Injun and punctuating each yip by fetching his doubled rope down upon the tail bones of the horse ahead of him. A black bag bobbed at his saddle horn. Whang Shannon was fetching Doc Skinner!

"Per schedule an' accordin' to orders!" he howled, lighting down and working at the doctor's bonds. "This dad-blamed pill-rassler had a feller all staked out an' was primed to knife him when I busted in. 'Lowed he couldn't come, but I convinced him different, thereby likely savin' some pore feller's life."

The irate medico stepped down when Whang had released him, strode up to Old Matt.

"Galagher!" he barked. "If this is yore

work you've gone too far! This fellow interrupted an operation of mine. Drew a gun on me, tied me up and roped me to the saddle like a bedding roll. Not to mention half killing my horse getting here . . ."

"Shut up an' get tuh work on Chunky's arm!" bellowed Whang, taking a step toward him. "Move!"

"Just a minute, Whang," commanded Matt, scowlingly. "What's the idea of holdin' up Doc Skinner?"

"I done exactly as you ordered," defended the red-head. "Eh, Chunky?"

"No less," grinned his injured pardner.

"You'll pay plenty for this day's work," charged the medico, shaking his fist at the old cowman.

"All of which I reckon you've earned, Doc," Matt grinned wryly. "But long as yo're here, git it over an' done. I'll pay the freight."

Cursing and grumbling, Doc Skinner set and splinted Chunky's arm. And to judge by the expression on Chunky's round face, it was he that paid the freight. In pain and in a wilful fight to keep from crying out. The kid's grit got under the angry doctor's hide and he was over his mad when he finished.

"Such pluckiness is refreshing in a boy, Matt," he murmured, admiringly. "Without complimenting the tall one on his direct methods, I reckon he's the same kind. I don't know who they are or what they're doin' on the Diamond G. But if I was running cows an' they come to my outfit, I'd hang my brand on 'em. Courage an' fightin' spirit never weakened an outfit that ever I heard of. But if you can't keep it in hand, it'll ride you with long spurs. I'll be out in a month, to take off the splints. In the meantime, if this long-shanked desperado comes into my office, I'll make him a case for the undertaker. Good day, sir!"

He rose to the saddle and, as he rode away, Whang flung him a challenge.

"You ever jerk a gun on me, Pill-roller, an' I'll ram it down yore neck—cocked!"

"Hear that!" cackled Chunky. "Ain't he a loo-loo? Hey, Whang! I c'raled us a job! We're signed on with the Diamond G an' I like it. You better hold 'er down for the both of us while I'm crippled up or by Godfrey I'll make you hard to ketch!"

From down near the corrals, Old Matt smilingly watched the two youngsters enthuse over the new vista opening up before them. Finding in their youthful ardor, balm for his haunting loneliness. Unblessed with wife or family he had never thoroughly realized his loss until now. He had been content with his lot on the Diamond G, simple in his tastes and easy going by temper. And for those very virtues had failed to build his outfit materially.

Matt was no fighter. He was prone to shrug away a loss, or to turn the other cheek to those who transgressed his rights. At its worst, the Diamond G had supported him and the two cowhands he kept on his payroll. Now he was suddenly conscious of a new responsibility and the pleasureable stirrings of a long-dormant fighting urge that strangely eased the lonely ache of his heart. And he was glad he had been on hand to hear the caterwauling of these two friendless, fighting waifs.

A month went by. A month marked by a turbulent upheaval in the orderly routine of the Diamond G. The two kids were continually in trouble. If there was none handy, they made some. Disgusted, the two veteran cowhands put it up to Old Matt. Either the kids went, or they did. That was easy for Matt, who seemed to thrive and grow younger under the strain. His laugh was hearty and his regret slight as he paid the two old timers off.

Doc Skinner came and went. Laughing at the wild scrap precipitated when he took the splints from Chunky's arm. The kids fought again when they dabbed their loops on the same bronc, in answer to Old Matt's invitation to cut themselves out a string.

Each day found them at each other's throats. But woebetide anyone who spoke ill of one in the other's presence—as Old Matt learned and didn't soon forget.

The months dragged on. Months in which Chunky proved his cow savvy. Months in which Whang made good his boast that he could top anything with hair. Then Chunky turned up missing! He failed to come in one night and, though Old Matt was more concerned than he let on, he argued all the next day with Whang to give Chunky till next morning to show up. Whang gave in grudgingly, and next morning was himself missing. With Matt's fastest pony and a week's supply of grub.

"Over in the Latigo Hills!" grinned Chunky.

"The Latigo Hills? Hell, Kid, you can't do that. Them hills is on Slash M. range! These critters belongs to Slade Montee!"

"The Latigo Hills is open range," corrected the youngster. "An' Montee lost his right to these critters when he didn't sleeper 'em while they was suckin' their mammies. They was long-eared yearlin's, Matt, when I saw 'em. *Orejanas,* as the *paisanos* say. Mavericks, we calls 'em in Texas. I roped 'em, ironed 'em, worked the salt outa their hides an' druv 'em home. An' that ends the argument."

There were a lot of things Matt would have said in answer. But he didn't voice them as he helped corral the young beef. After all, one can't bawl out a fifteen-a-month hand who has made six hundred dollars for the outfit in a week. Chunky was right about the Latigo Hills being open range, although it lay right in the back yard of the truculent Slash M outfit. So far, he'd gotten along with Slade Montee by letting that arrogant range boss do as he pleased. But now . . .

A shrill yell gave Matt's cogitations pause. A wild hullo that was echoed by Chunky. Out of the west came a clattering cavvy of ponies, hazed corralward by sagging, blear-eyed Whang Shannon. Six weary, sweat streaked mustangs, spur and saddle marked and showing the indubitable signs of having been ridden out.

"Ain't they dandies?" hollered the beanpole. "The makin's of a top hawss in ever' one. I had two more, but couldn't hold 'em—the snuffy sons of rabbits."

"Where'd you get them fuzzies?" roared Old Matt, apprehensively.

"And That Ends The Argument"

The following week was the most miserable of Matt's life. Cursing the rain that blotted out the youngsters' trails. He hadn't realized how that pair had grown on him. Gaunt and worn, the old cowman was sitting on his veranda when a dust cloud showed to the south. Whispering a prayer, Matt mounted, rode out to meet a dusty, disheveled, but grinningly happy Chunky. Driving before him an even dozen long yearlings that showed every evidence of having been necked down to saplings to take the booger out. Wild bush cattle, fresh branded with Matt's own Diamond G.

"Where in the hell?" rapped the cowman, rearing up to Chunky, "have you been? What's this beef yo're hazin', young feller?"

"This," grinned the kid, waving a weary arm over the tired cattle, "is just twelve more head uh critters under our iron. Nice ain't they?"

"Nice jail bait!" barked Old Matt. "Out with it, Kid. Where'd you get these?"

"Outa that wild band at the head of the Salt Fork of Picketwire!" came the kid's enthusiastic answer. "Trapped the wild 'uns in a box canyon an' taken my own sweet time to lass 'em an' knock off their humps. Cripes, but they was crooked! I spent more time flyin' than ridin'!"

"You fool!" rapped Old Matt, irately. "You taken 'em out from under the noses of the Boxed K boys. Good thing they didn't spot you. They'd uh shot first an' asked yore business afterwards."

"That musta bin one of 'em I pistol whupped jest as I was leavin'," grinned Whang. "He was plumb careless of my feelin's an' I . . ."

"Buffaloed a Boxed K rider?" yelped the cowman, painfully. "My God, Whang, you've drawed the lightnin' right down on me!"

"An', Weepin' Annie!" screeched Chunky. "It's strikin' right now! Look!"

They whirled to stare in the direction of the rotund kid's leveled finger. Coming at a determined lope, their faces coldly grim, were four riders. Leading them was swart, gaunt-eyed Sting Kirby, bellicose boss of the Boxed K.

WHANG BRAGS SOME

The Boxed K cavalcade roared into the yard, curbing in a cloud of dust. One of the riders, a gangling youngster with a badly blued left eye, leveled a finger at Whang.

"That's him, boss!" he bellowed. "That's the jigger that roped me offa my hawse an' half beat me to death while I was still woozy! Yeah, an' them are the ponies he taken offa yore range!"

Sting Kirby, a bitter, sneering warrior who had striven unceasingly against Slade Montee's Slash M for control of the basin, eyed the ponies from between narrowed lids, looked the grinning Whang up and down, then turned hostile eyes to Old Matt Galagher.

"Feller," he rumbled, with studied arrogance, "this hungry lookin' coyote is plumb mixed in his geography. He's bin trespassin' my range an' has cut a bunch of my cayuses. I reckon you know that he's lucky to git back here alive?"

"Not lucky," chuckled Whang. "Jest smart. Like this cowhop of yores. Had he drawed a gun on me, I'd a took it away from him an' beat him spraddle laigged. . . ."

"Then him an' me would a come callin' on you, feller," added Chunky, snarlingly, "an' made a bunch quitter outa you."

"Hold on there!" rapped Old Matt. "Shut up, Whang! An' you too, Chunky! Kirby, what's yore point? If you got anything on yore chest, unpin it!"

"I'll make it short an' sweet, Galagher," answered Kirby. "I'm takin' them ponies back with me an' the next time I ketch—"

"You an' who else?" yelped Whang, sliding his hand toward his rusty hogleg. "If yo're the big he-coon of these ranges, it's time the' was a change."

"Galagher!" clipped Sting Kirby, grimly. "I ain't lowerin' myself by makin' no truck with children. But I warn you; yore boys is taken' the shortest cut to gettin' theirselfs kilt. What you doin' about it, personal?"

A red flush crept up from Old Matt's neck. With a flashing movement belying his age, he whipped his Colt's from its leather, tilted it up.

"Kirby," he said, stiffly. "You ask me what I'm doin'. That's easy. I'm doin' what the coon done fer Davy Crockett—settin' tight! This ain't the first time you've laid tongue to me an' mebbyso it ain't the last. I kin take it, Kirby. But when you make yore brags that yo're linin' yore sights on my boys fer a killin', yo're goin' too far! If you've got marks on these ponies that'll prove 'em yores, climb down an' point 'em out. Otherwise stir a tall dust off'n the Diamond G. Git!"

Sting Kirby went white with anger. "All

right, Galagher," he sneered. "I'm glad yo're wavin' yore flag. Only one man's bin strong enough to buck me on Holster Basin, an' he's ridin' to a shore fall. Don't think I'll let a stove-up, two-bit spread lay back its ears to me. I'll be seein' you again, feller. C'mon, boys!"

They whirled their horses and loped away. Staring after them, Old Matt was trembling in the grip of a savage reaction as he holstered his gun. Chunky stepped up beside him, low rumblings in his thick throat.

"D i r t y, yella-striped polecats!" he mouthed. "See us again, eh? Not unless he's lookin' into the muzzle of a gun, he won't!"

"Shut up!" Old Matt whirled on him. "You've drawed me smack-dab into a killin' ruckus; you two an' yore wide loop business. Yo're fired! Git offa the place an' stay off!"

Legs pumping stiffly, he strode to the porch, sunk dejectedly into his rawhide chair and rolled a cigarette. Deviled by the prospect of danger. Falling back into the lax ways of a lifetime. Cursing himself for the thing he had just allowed himself to do in anger. Through eyes drenched with misery and loneliness, he watched the two kids saddle their top horses, tie their plunder on behind, then stride up to him with purposeful grins on their freckled faces.

"What you want now?" he barked, sullenly.

"How about our time?" asked Whang.

"Time?" roared Old Matt. "Well, how about it? When I take out Chunky's doctor bill an' the price o' them two outfits yo're ridin' off, you owe me money."

The youngsters looked at each other, glanced at Matt scornfully and turned away. As if mebby the old cowman had a leg to stand on thataway. Upon his part, Matt had used that leverage in the hope of making them stay on without sacrificing his own pride. A vain hope. Stride for stride that ludicrously matched pair moved to their ponies, rose to the saddles and rode away. Without so much as a backward look.

When they had clattered across the log bridge and had vanished in the creek timber, Old Matt became the victim of a sudden panic. What had he done? He'd run off at the head like a jackass-brayin' old fool and fired his boys. The two most lovable, ranicky fighting fools he had ever met. Kids who had revived his youth and put the fire of ambition under his tail. Fired 'em because they'd proved their loyalty to the outfit in a material way. Fired 'em because he was scairt of Sting Kirby and Slade Montee.

Old Matt's voice lifted in the loneliness. Cursing himself for all kinds of a fool. Scourging himself with a hundred bitter self recriminations. And when he had exhausted his stock of self deprecatory terms, he reared up, dashed to the corral, leather-rigged a fast pony and set off after Whang and Chunky. He caught them about two miles from the ranch, shoved his pony in between theirs and commenced to talk. Before he had convinced them that the one thing he genuinely wanted was for them to return, at puncher's wages, they were ten miles from the Diamond G and only two from Peralta town. And upon their agreeing to return, he took them into town and spread himself buying them top outfits. From wide brimmed Stetsons to fancy stitched boots. It was all a mistake, the old cowman told himself grimly, that he would not soon repeat.

In the days that followed, the Diamond G grew alarmingly. And Whang Shannon and Chunky Blake were responsible. Passing time, in toughening their muscles and their beards, made little difference in their weird proportions. They still quarreled and fought and flirted outrageously with Old Lady Trouble. In Peralta, it became a by-word that to lick one a man must lick

both—a real chore in any lingo. Throughout the Holster Basin, and far beyond, they were known as Old Man Galagher's boys—tophands both, better than the best with horse and cow and rope, and tough hombres to fool with.

The Diamond G was no longer looked down upon by the Boxed K and the Slash M. It was now bigger than either of those outfits, thanks to the efforts of Matt's boys. Nor were those efforts dishonest. To them a maverick was a maverick and a brand was a brand. Chunky had plenty cow savvy. It was he who incurred Old Matt's ire by trading a hundred head of the wild bush stuff for six whiteface heifers and a blooded bull. The best move they ever made, and Matt came to admit it.

Whang, with a consuming love for horses, built that love into money for Old Matt. He combed the hills for the better colts among the wild mustang herds. He deviled Matt until he bought a Morgan stallion for interbreeding. He swapped horseflesh with the best and never lost. Matt's horse business became as important as beef. Horses gentled and trained for cutting by Whang came to be in high demand.

Trouble? Once in a while it lifted its head. Sting Kirby and Slade Montee had their hand in some of it. But they were bucking fighters now who made them rue their incursions of the Diamond G. They took it out mostly in veiled hints as to what they were going to do about their losses that were making Diamond G grow.

Came the time when there were a dozen hands riding for Old Matt. Chunky was cow boss and Whang horse boss. That sort of rivalry kept them out of each other's hair while providing them an outlet for their fighting spirits. It also was the cause of splitting their long partnership asunder, of estranging them both from Old Matt and of putting the Diamond G on the rocks.

Matt had come to have every confidence now in the judgments of this pair. And so it was easy for them to talk him into expanding. Matt borrowed money from the bank to buy blooded breeding stock, both horses and cattle. That seemed to be the turning point in the fortunes of the Diamond G. Three years of drouth coupled with downward plunging beef prices brought a crisis. The fact that the cowmen couldn't buy trained cutting horses didn't help any. When the banker warned Old Matt that he would be unable to renew the loan because of unsettled range conditions, the Diamond G boss looked disaster right in the face.

Everything that could be sold went. Even at the prevailing give-away price. The amount realized was still short of the debt. Matt was licked and admitted it. But Whang and Chunky didn't know the meaning of the word. There was a horse buyer in Peralta who had orders for large numbers of cheap horses for mountain resorts in California. There were mustangs in the hills for the taking. Whang Shannon led three riders out to trap them. In the thick scrub-oak and manzanita forests near the head of Piñon Canyon there were wild cattle. Boogery longhorns and Mexican reds. Some of them steers that hadn't known the feel of a rope in ten years. According to Chunky, they could be rounded up and shipped. Every little bit added to what you've got . . .

Chunky greased up the hoodlum wagon and established a camp of eight good ropers at Piñon Springs. And went to work. Working the brushiest, godawful, rear-back-and-fall-down range a cowpuncher ever broke his neck riding. The first wide circles flushed Ol' Thunderbolt—a frog-built, fire-breathin' renegade roan steer that weighed a lot closer to fourteen hundred than to twelve. A cagey brute wild as a deer. Victor in a dozen brushes with M Slash ropers, who had endowed the creature with almost supernatural qualities.

Montana Yates, as good a dally man as ever came out of northern ranges, was the first Diamond G man to lay his rope on the huge renegade. His cast was true and he took his winds with the smoothness and certainty of long practice. Ol' Thunderbolt pulled his horse down, burned the dallies loose and three of Montana's fingers with it. With cowboys quartering in upon him, Ol' Thunderbolt swerved up the hill and outran all but one—Tommy Nolan, a die-hard man. Tommy roped the steer, the brute taking him and his horse over a rocky slant in a mad rush to escape. When they got to Tommy, his horse was hobbling around on three legs, Ol' Thunderbolt had broken the rope and hightailed and Tommy was dead, his neck broken.

There was a mighty glum outfit gathered around the wagon fire that night when Whang Shannon rode in from his horse camp on the Picketwire. Montana Yates had ridden to Peralta to have his lacerated hand doctored. Another of the hands had set out for town with all that was mortal of Tommy Nolan. Old Matt wondered afterwards why nobody told Whang about the fatality. Mebby it was because no one wanted to think about it. The talk was all of Thunderbolt and how he might be caught.

A half humorous smile twisted the tall buckaroo's face as he listened.

"Cow country's shore changin', gents," he twitted them. "Once cowboys was a tough lot but them days are gone. Camps is full of ol' wimmen an' broke-down hoe men. Gents scairt of dirtyin' their jeans or buildin' a loop fer fear they'll twine their own bronc. If I wasn't so busy gentlin' fuzzies so's you pilgrims can set 'em while they switch flies, I'd take a half hour or so an' show you all how to lasso this Thunderbolt."

A deadly silence greeted his brag. It was said in hooraw and they all knew it. But somehow, after Tommy's death, it sounded like sacrilege. Old Matt's mouth drew into a grim line and his eyes were burning pools as he stared at Whang. But the horse boss seemed not to notice. He rose, stretched his lithe six-feet-three and strode to the chuck box for a coffee cup. Singing cheerily as he went:

"Oh, I kin tip a lasso, an' with the greatest ease,
Dab a loop on Thunderbolt an' tie him slick as grease!"

Chunky got slowly to his feet, his face white as marble. He'd helped bandage Montana's mangled hand. He'd looked upon the frozen horror in Tommy Nolan's dead face.

"Feller!" he barked. "When a cowhand makes his brags it's usual to make him go plumb through or eat crow meat. But when a common hawss peeler tries to tell cow folks how to run their business, that's somethin' different. I aim to make you eat them words. Peel yore bark!"

Whang halted, turned, a foolish smile showing his puzzlement. But before either he or Chunky could move into the inevitable fight, Old Matt stood up. A colder, grimmer Matt than any of them had ever seen.

"Back off, Chunky," he warned. "I'll do what doin' the' is to be did. Whang, I don't want you to worry none about gentlin' hawsses fer us pilgrims to set. If the critters is too snuffy, we'll take our pillin's an' grin 'em off. Time was when I've stood fer yore braggin' an' liked it. But this ain't one of the times. Yo're fired fer talkin' too big on the night that we've sent pore Tommy Nolan down to his grave. He tied onto Thunderbolt today an' got smashed to bloody rags. Montana's gone to the medico with three fingers off his ropin' hand. He laid his rope over Thunderbolt's hawns. Ol' wimmen, eh? Mebbyso. I ain't answerin' that. But I am firin' you an' bettin' you five hundred simoleons ag'in' the piece of a month you got comin' that you can't tie that roan killer!"

Whang's eyes blinked. His lank form straightened and his feet shuffled restlessly. From his expression one couldn't tell what his feelings were. But one sure thing, he knew from Old Matt's attitude that this firing would stick, that he had never before seen the old man really mad. A slow and meagre smile grew on his lips as he fashioned a cigarette.

"It's a bet, Matt," he said softly. "I'm sorry about Tommy an' Montana. I didn't know. But I kin use yore five hundred an' I'll ketch yore Thunderbolt jest to prove I was right. I'll neck him to a saplin' fer a few days an' be back at the ranch in a week or so." He bowed scornfully about the circle of awed faces, his eyes lingering a moment on Chunky, his long-time partner. "I'll bid you ladies good night. An' see you at the knittin' party, when the moon comes full."

He strode to his picketed horse, saddled up and mounted. For a long moment he sat looking at Chunky, as if expecting some word from him. But the rotund cow boss kept his eyes averted, masking his feelings in a brooding sullenness. Then Whang was gone and Old Matt had crossed to hunker beside Chunky.

"I'm sorry, Chunky," he said feelingly, "but doggone it I had to fire him. It's true he didn't have no way of knowin' an' that it's his way of hoorawin'. But, by God, we seen that brute kill a good boy today. An' to have a loose-lipped blowhard tell us that we . . ."

"An' now you want Thunderbolt to rub Whang out the same way," murmured Chunky, tonelessly. "That it?"

"Not at all," protested the unhappy cowman. "I've liked Whang same as a son. He's been a tophand an' has earned ever' cent I've paid him. But"—he drew his hand wearily across his brow—"talkin' loose an' lippy ain't seemin' fer a boy that's fought his way into an' out of as much trouble as him. If a man don't know, he's got no business talkin'; that's the lesson Whang's gotta learn. I don't aim to leave him stay fired. Tell you what you do, Chunky: You step out after that long coupled son. If he flushes Ol' Thunderbolt, you stand by to he'p him. An' if he fails, which I'm plumb shore he will, let him know in a nice way that all he's gotta do to get his job back is to face the boys an' tell 'em that he talked outa turn an' take back what he said about 'em bein' old wimmen."

Chunky nodded scowlingly. "I'm yore huckleberry, Matt," he murmured, tonelessly. "I'll be seein' you."

HAMMER AND TONGS

At dawn, Chunky was pounding leather at rimrock. Using all his trail and cow savvy hunting for Ol' Thunderbolt . . . and Whang Shannon. All day he rode, hunting sign. Late in the afternoon, he found it; fresh tracks of the killer

steer in the damp sand of Salt Fork. Tracks too of a fast traveling horse.

All day he followed that trail, threading the brush thickets until the last vestige of daylight was gone. And through the darkness until his last match was gone. The story was plain to read. It took real horseflesh to run down Ol' Thunderbolt. And a lot more than that to rope and tie him. Chunky cursed, picketed his pony, made a frugal meal from the dry jerky in his saddle pocket and spent the night shivering.

Dawn broke with a chilly drizzle that stiffened jumper and saddle-creased jeans, that bit into a man's bones. With his slicker draped over his finicky maguey rope, Chunky picked up the trail again and followed it into the brakes, where Salt Fork joins its meagre flow to the milky waters of Juniper Creek. And there, from a brushy hogback, he had his first glimpse of Whang Shannon. The tall buckaroo was carefully rimming the brushy hillside, his rope held under his jumper to protect it from the wet.

Now, with a mighty crackling of wet brush, the big roan steer broke back upon his trail. His nostrils flaring. His wet coat gleaming and his eyes afire. Heading back into his hills. With yipping Whang hard on his tail.

A fierce surge of gladness swept Chunky. He had the bulge on Whang. A swift dip down the stiff slant would put him fairly in the path of that locomoting cow-brute. With a deft movement, he cast off his slicker, unsnapped his dry rope and shook out a loop as he steeled his pony. Wet brush slapped him cruelly, but he didn't feel it. The footing was treacherously soapy, but he heeded it not at all. All he could see was that rocketing red flash. All he knew was that he must tie his twine to the brute before Whang closed up.

Chunky poured steel mercilessly, surged downward in a quartering diagonal. In death-defying jumps. The race was on! A three cornered race between two inseparable partners and a wild mossy horn that didn't know its own strength and power. Strident clatter of hoofs and dislodged stones. Swish of brush. Creak of wet leather. Grunts of the straining ponies. Thunder of the brush-crashing steer and the shrill whistle of whirling ropes.

Riding aslant, Chunky closed in fast. Cut in ahead of Ol' Thunderbolt. The wary beast saw him coming, swerved away. But Chunky's rope was spinning out, settling flat and true over those spreading needle horns. But once again the steer's cageyness saved him. With a mighty effort, he flung himself away from the hissing maguey to avoid the cast. An action that checked his mad speed and gave Whang his chance. Even as the tall buckaroo's loop spun out, Chunky knew it would be good. And the knowledge drained the blood from his florid face. For Ol' Thunderbolt was turning to plunge directly over an ugly, straight-up-and-down slant.

Chunky's tongue went cotton dry and he had a momentary vision of Tommy Nolan's dead face as they dragged him out of that death wreckage. Sobbing agonized oaths, the rotund cow boss dropped his wasted loop and stabbed for his holstered .45. With the feel of Whang's rope against his neck, the steer bawled . . . and leaped out into space. Whang croaked hoarsely as the rampant wildling flung himself into the lariat, as his pony left its feet at the jerk to soar after the cow-brute. Like the tail of a comet.

Twelve hundred pounds of man and horse tied hard and fast to the panicky rush of a fourteen hundred pound killer steer. Suicide on the make!

A sickening, thudding crash! Another! Steer and horse and man piling down upon that deadly, rock studded talus! A twisting, writhing shambles of blood and sand and leather.

. . Chunky was racing for the brink. Sobbing a name.

"Whang! Whang! Oh, my God, Whang!"

Out of that threshing hell below him, two bronzed hands were lifting. Whang's hands! Holding hogging strings that found the jerking legs of the huge steer and bound them deftly. There was little resistance from Ol' Thunderbolt. He was dead from a bullet through the neck. And drifting down the draw came the thin echoes of a distant rifle shot.

Then Chunky was down there, rolling a broken-necked pony off a dazed and bloodied rider. Whang came up, reeling a little, grinning pridefully. His mouth opened to vent one of his boastful speeches. He never uttered it. Sight of that blood-welling bullet hole in Ol' Thunderbolt's neck was like a blow in the buckaroo's face. He stiffened. His grin faded to a snarl and a deadly chill crept into his gray eyes.

Now he stooped, ran an exploring finger into that bullet hole. And a thin, humorless laugh dribbled across his tight lips.

"So!" he gritted. "Shot him when you saw you'd missed! A damn lousy capper fer a shore thing gambler. Matt lays his bets, then draws 'em with his bushed-up cowboss an' a six shooter play! All right, Chunky, I'm glad I savvied jest how you stood before I traveled the same trail further with you. All right! Tell Matt you done his rotten biddin' . . . but not till after Whang Shannon roped an' tied Ol' Thunderbolt. You shot jest too late to save him his five hundred dollars."

Chunky looked at him squarely. With a hurt an' sober look in his eyes. He wanted to tell Whang about that shot he'd heard. Wanted to tell him that his gun was full to the eyes and hadn't been fired. But Chunky too was a fighting man and he didn't like Whang's tone. Then too, he was obsessed by the knowledge that he would have done this thing himself, had not Whang been between him and the steer. His lips curled in a sneer.

"You ain't hobbled, feller," he rumbled. "If you want Matt told, tell him yoreself. An' then go plumb to hell!"

Whang blinked. "Runt," he snarled. "We've bin pardners fer a long time. But here's where we're splittin' our soogans. Git on back to yore lovin' Diamond G spread an' be the peg to hang Matt's dirty Levi's on."

"If you want to bust up, feller," gloomed Chunky, "It's all right with me. But I'm for the Diamond G all the time, from line camps to cattle cars. I know when I'm well off."

"What's holdin' you then? Set yore ankles on fire gettin' back to it before I bust yore hammered down carcass into little chunks an' big 'uns an' throw the pieces to the buzzards. Run!"

"Run?" Chunky affected puzzlement. "What's that. Must be somethin' I've neglected in my eddication."

"Run's what you do," sneered the tall buckaroo, "when yuh ain't got the guts tuh fight."

"Oh!" Chunky laughed nastily. "What kind of a fight kin I look fer, if I don't run?"

"This k i n d!" rapped Whang, and bounced hard knuckles off Chunky's chin.

With a roar, the rotund puncher came bouncing up. Surging at Whang with his short arms swinging. Whang dropped into a crouch, parried a few of those swings but gave ground as a dirty jolt jarred his wind. Right, left! Right, left! Chunky's right split the buckaroo's lip, staggering him. And the smaller man was roaring in to finish it. Wide open for the looping haymaker Whang fetched up from his bootstraps to drop him again.

Again Chunky came up and they mixed it furiously. No longer ranicky kids finding an outlet for their fighting spirits. But two range-hardened stalwarts expressing

their new-found hate in combat. Using all they'd learned in years of fighting to beat each other down. No science. Nothing pretty. Just flying fists, hate-contorted faces and straining bodies. Hammer and tongs!

Height and reach were all against Chunky. But he made up for those, in part, with ruggedness and rubber tenacity. In close, he beat at the taller man's midriff, felt the steam go out of Whang's long arms. With blood smeared grins, they stood and swung. Heart and face, stomach and kidneys. Youngsters of whang leather and steel. It couldn't last.

Whang slipped a long uppercut through Chunky's swinging guard. A lucky blow, mebby, but packing the kick of a mule. It snapped the chunky puncher's head back, lifted his pounds as if they were ounces and dropped him quivering. Not entirely out. But paralyzed from shock and out of the fight. And Whang was sneering at him from between puffing breaths.

"In shootin' that steer, feller, you same as kilt my hawse. So I'm takin' yores. Walkin' won't do that taller of yores no harm. Tell Matt what I told you an' tell him I'll be in Peralta a few days expectin' him to ride in an' pay me. As fer you"—he tossed his head—"you've slid back. Once I was hard put to whup yore ears back. This was easy an' I didn't git the same enjoyment out of it. Next time you cross my trail, shake yore cutter loose. We'll settle this once an' fer all like men!"

Turning, he scrambled up the bank and vanished. Chunky heard him ride away, groaned. The ranicky, loud mouthed son. Talkin' guns now. Bloodsweatin'. If only he had tried to explain. But then Whang was on the prod worse'n a wormy bull. And who in the hell had gunned that red outlaw steer? Puzzled, sore and faced with a long walk to camp, Chunky dragged himself erect and started that hardest chore for any "hawse an' rope" man. Smarting in defeat. Deeply troubled as to what he could say to Old Matt. But, more than anything else, deviled with a sudden, unaccountable loneliness.

WAR CLOUDS

Old Matt Galagher stroked his stubbled jaw as he watched Chunky Blake soaking his blistered feet in the creek. His eyes were glinting savagely.

"So that animated wagon tongue orders me to fetch five hundred dollars into Peralta town an' pay it over to him, eh? An' with Ol' Thunderbolt dead. Like hell I will. I've got nothin' but yore word that he earned the dinero . . . an' that ain't the way I get it. If he wants the money bad enough an' figgers he won it, he'll come out here like a man an' do his own augerin'. So he figgered you shot the steer, eh?" The old cowman smiled thinly. "An' whupped you fer it? Well! Seems like that orta satisfied him. If he was in his right mind . . ."

"He roped the Thunderbolt," Chunky reminded him, worrying a piece of cold meat from the chuck box. "An' tied it while it was still kickin'. Looks to me like you owe him the money."

"Which I'll pay if he comes out here humble an' asks fer it!" snapped Old Matt. "I told myself when I drawed my sights on that faunchin' steer that I'd pay it, regardless of how my shot come out. We'd had one killin' an' I didn't hone to see another."

"You?" Chunky whirled to face him. "It was you that shot Thunderbolt?"

"An' good shootin' fer a old man," grinned Matt.

Chunky bounced up, pale with sudden anger. "Too good shootin' to suit me!" he raged. "I reckon Whang was right. You did pull yore bets. I can't swaller it, Matt. Make me out my time!"

"Aw, Chunky!" Matt's face was working strangely. "Now don't you git ringy with the old man. Yo're all I've got . . . now.

Lissen . . . you ride on in to Peralta, find Whang an' tell him to come back. You two git yore hackles down; I'll eat humble pie. An' when we git this mortgage cleaned up, I'll give you both five hundred dollars. I'll do better than that; I'll . . ."

Chunky shook his head. "Too late fer that, Matt. Too late since you squeezed the trigger on Thunderbolt. If you want Whang, go get him yoreself. Him an' me are split wider apart than quartered beef. We've split our soogans. I'm driftin'; pay me off!"

Matt argued, hysterically. But he argued in vain. Chunky was stubborn. He was hurt and disappointed in Old Matt. But most of all, he was upset and troubled by a new and awful loneliness. Through his mind flashed pictures of his lanky partner writhing down in a fog of gunsmoke. He could feel the crush of Whang's lead and the gush of his own life blood. Bitter, poignant and very real pictures. Pictures etched by that bullet Old Matt had fired from rim rock. Better far if Ol' Thunderbolt had done his worst to him, or to Whang. Or to both of them. Injured bodies will heal. Pride hurts and soul hurts linger on. And a challenge to a fighting man is a deathless thing till met.

Chunky left a crushed and wordless Matt Galagher, rode away into the night. Steeling his heart to the old man's obvious suffering. Little knowing that the clinching arguments for his continued loyalty to the Diamond G were yet to be spoken this night.

A half hour had passed since Chunky had ridden away. Old Matt sat brooding by the small campfire. The Diamond G punchers were stretched out in their beds. The pound of hoofs roused the camp. A hail! The punchers rolled to their elbows. Old Matt leaped up, staring into the shrouding darkness with a grin of hopefulness. Mayhap this was a penitent Chunky . . . or Whang Shannon.

It was neither. Foaming into camp came Slade Montee, Slash M boss, and two of his gun riders. With a flourish, he swerved his pony, lit down and faced Old Matt. A huge bodied, cruelly smiling man whose dominant arrogance oozed from his every pore.

"Galagher," he snapped, without preamble. "I've been told you are gathering a herd of wild steers in these hills. That right?"

"Right as rain," murmured Matt.

"For what?"

"That's my business, Montee."

"And mine!" smiled the bullying cowman. "It may interest you to know that I've taken over your mortgage from the bank! I don't propose to let you drive off yore cattle and sell them right on the eve of foreclosure. You've already gone too far in that. The bank couldn't stop it. I can!"

"I see." Matt stroked his chin, struggling to still his anger and to mask his hatred for this man who had deviled him from his first day on Holster range. "So you hold the paper on the Diamond G? An' are foreclosin'? What you aim to do if I go on with this gather?"

"Take the stock, of course. And sell it for what it'll fetch?"

"Applyin' the money on the loan?"

Montee laughed softly. "What difference does that make, feller. You know yo're licked an' so do I. Go ahead an' work up here fer me, if you want to. But don't try to drive yore gather to rail. That'll draw the lightnin' right down on yore head. I aim to handle the financial arrangements myself."

"You'd give 'em away!" yelped the Diamond G boss. "Just to keep me from payin' off!"

Montee nodded. "Why not? I want yore spread, not yore money. So remember what I told yuh. Don't start a drive. If you do, it'll mean war!"

Without waiting for any argument, he

mounted again, jerked his head to his gunmen and rode from the camp. Matt's world was crashing about him as he stared after them. Unable to weigh this latest calamity. Missing now the judgment and fighting iron of his two "boys," even as he knew he must always miss them if he allowed them now to get away. His bitter reflections were interrupted by a roar of hoofs from quite another quarter. Matt spun about and recoiled in sudden fear. Trotting leisurely into camp came Sting Kirby and a half dozen of his riders. Sting was smiling genially, stroking his spike mustaches blithely as he swung from his leather.

"H'are yuh, Galagher!" he greeted, suavely. "Howdy, boys! Matt, it just happened that I overheard what yore caller just said. Not snoopin', you understand, but just ridin' to'rds yore camp when I saw him enter. An' bein' a witness. Looks like Slade's got you over the hip . . . like he's got me."

"You?" asked Matt, grasping at straws. "How's he got you? Paper?"

"Yeah. But not the kind you think. Usin' some kind of a pull, he's sewed up the government lease of my grazin' lands. An' me supposed to have the refusal of 'em. That will leave me with the Boxed K cattle an' a quarter section of patented land to graze 'em on. That's the way Montee's got me."

Old Matt nodded, little cheered by a recitation of another's troubles. "He'll just about own Holster Basin," he said, miserably. "Unless we kin find some way to check rein him."

"We'll need to stick together, Galagher, to do that," leered Kirby. "That's why I rode here soon as ever I heard you was roundin' up here. You an' me—we've had some augerments. But they're over an' done with. Say the word an' I'll throw my hands in with yores till you've gathered yore beef an' delivered to rail."

Old Matt scowled. "What's the rest of it, Kirby?"

"Nothin' much, Galagher. Just merely that you say that we've bin camped here workin' these slants along with the Diamond G."

Matt eyed him narrowly. "Meanin' jest what?"

Sting Kirby managed to wolfish smile. "Meanin' that Slade Montee's son, Bill, went an' committed suicide by hangin' hisself over on my range yesterday. Slade is shore to blame us unless we got a alibi, savvy? You got everything to gain, seein' that sooner or later a accident is gonna happen to Mister Slade Montee. Very sad. Yuh see, a dead man won't be leasin' no government ranges. An' a dead man's estate is some slower than the man hisself in foreclosin' a mortgage. You an' me just gotta stand together, Matt. What you say?"

Old Matt shook his head, glaring. "No, Kirby, I reckon not. I'm a lone wolf an' sorta figger tuh stay thataway. I'll stand my hand."

Kirby sneered. "Yo're a fool, man! You'll never git them beefs through without help."

"I'll chance that, Kirby."

Sting Kirby flushed angrily. "You're diggin' yore own grave, feller. Even with them two fightin' boys uh yore'n, you can't buck Montee. An' think what'll happen if somethin' sad should happen to one or both uh them."

"Already has," murmured Matt, miserably. "They ain't with the Diamond G no more. They're gone."

"Where?"

"Quien sabe?"

"All the more reason you should play with me," argued Kirby, and in his eyes had flamed a hungry, predatory look. "I betcha them two kids has gone over to Montee."

"No . . . no!" Matt shook his head. "They wouldn't do that."

"We'll see. How about you? You playin' on my side?"

"I'm goin' it alone, Kirby!"

The man's face twisted as he rattled his huge roweled spurs to his horse and flung astride. "If a man ain't with me," he raged, "he's ag'in' me! Next time, you'll come whinin' to me. C'mon, boys, let's ride!"

They roared out of the wagon camp. Heading toward Peralta by the same trail that Chunky had taken less than an hour before.

GUN SHOWDOWN

After a restless half night in the hay mow of the Peralta Stables, Chunky Blake rose to lave himself in the horse trough. He hadn't rested. His sleep had been filled with dreams of gun fights, of painful wounds and of endless battling. Now his eyes were as heavy as his heart; his feet were swollen tightly into his boots and he ached in every joint.

The cool water made him feel better and, as he left the stable for the Chink restaurant, he could smile a little at the nightmare of darkness. As yet, there were few people about. But before the Apex Saloon were an even dozen ponies wearing the Boxed K on their right hips. Evidently Sting Kirby and his hairpins were doing some early likkering.

Chunky himself turned into the Maverick, directly across from the Apex, had an eye-opener and an admonition from an excited bartender to, ". . . picket yoreself somewhere close, Chunky. You'll see some fun unless my ear's picked up somethin' slimy out of the ground. The Boxed K is holdin' down the Apex. I understand the Slash M will be in to talk turkey with the gent that hung Slade Montee's boy Bill. So don't go away."

Chunky nodded, tossed off his drink and went to breakfast. When he hit the street again, he ran smack-dab into Doc Skinner, the sawbones that had set his arm, that first day at the Diamond G. The medico, who had come to be quite an admirer of Matt's two "boys," eyed him soberly.

"Hello, Chunky," he greeted. "If you're looking for Whang, you'll find him in the Apex. Drinking with the Boxed K riders."

"I ain't lookin' fer him," murmured the rotund cowboy, uncomfortably. "An' I wouldn't git smelled up with skunk oil by drinkin' in the same saloon with the Boxed K if I was. Why?"

The medico shrugged. "Oh, I thought mebby you were looking for him. Lord knows, he needs somebody to bridle his tongue and corral him now. . . ."

"What you mean, Doc?"

"Whang's signed on with Sting Kirby! He's lappin' up forty-rod busthead an' telling the world what he's going to do to Old Matt, the man that made him." He looked at Chunky queerly. "Swears to gut shoot you on sight. What's happened, Chunky?"

"He's been eatin' loco," growled Chunky. "I was hopin' that he'd . . ." He was fated not to tell Doc what he hoped. A roar of hoofs sounded from the west end and a body of horsemen came loping in. Cold faced, grim-eyed and riding with their hands very close to their belted hardware. Before the Maverick, they lit down, racked their ponies. Watching the front of the Apex with insolent concern. Then they trooped into the Maverick. Doc Skinner shook his heavy shoulders restlessly.

"There's blood on the moon, son," he murmured. "With things coming that'll make carrion of strong men and make wimmen weep. The kind of a day when I'm glad I'm a doctor an' not a warrior. By noon, business should be pickin' up for me an' the undertaker."

His fine eyes gloomed as he studied the ash of his perfecto. Abashed, Chunky held silent until he became aware of someone standing beside him. It was towering Slade Montee, his coarse face split in something that might pass for a friendly grin.

"H'are yuh, Kid?" he beamed, and stuck out a flabby hand. "They're tellin' me that you've quit Ol' Matt Galagher. That right?"

Doc Skinner lifted startled eyes to Chunky, who nodded soberly.

"News," he murmured, "has a way of travelin' most mortal fast."

"Fine!" gloated the big cowman. "That's great. If Galagher can't use his fightin' men, I shore can. How's fer workin' fer the Slash M?"

"Doin' what?"

"Ridin' gun, by hell! At seventy five an' ca'tridges!"

Chunky's eyes widened and Doc Skinner

"Don't do it, son," begged the medico. "You'll be mixin' in a fight that's none of yore own. You'll likely get killed . . . for what? For the promise of seventy-five a month. Think it over, Chunky."

"I'll take plenty killin', Doc," boasted the heavy-set puncher. "An' I'm doin' my own thinkin'. Lead out, Mister Montee."

The doctor watched them turn into the Maverick, then shuffled wearily away. His eyes somber and brooding. Shaking his shaggy head in puzzlement. Heading in his own good time for the stable, where he rigged a pony and rode away. On business of his own.

The morning passed with the voicing of

The Slash M Gunners Ride

was watching him intently. The rotund cowpuncher seemed to be fighting a battle inside himself. But not for long. He grinned, nodded.

"You've signed on a tough hand, Mister Montee."

Dock Skinner laid a restraining hand on Chunky's shoulder.

"You can't do that, Chunky. You've got Old Matt to think about. The man that took you in as a chubby kid and gave you your chance. He needs you now, more'n he ever needed you. You owe it to him to stay with the Diamond G."

"I don't owe him nothin'!" corrected Chunky. "He owes me. He cost me the best thing I ever had; all I ever had . . ."

"You'll get yore chance to be square with that o'nery ol' polecat," put in Slade Montee. "Mebby you fellers don't know that Sting Kirby, or some of his men, hung my boy Bill yesterday. I'm squarin' fer that today. An' when Kirby's out uh the picture, I'm runnin' Matt Galagher plumb offa Holster range. That's where yore laugh will come in, Chunky. C'mon, le's have a drink on it."

many a grisly plan and the downing of much hard liquor. The plans had to do with the best way to bait Sting Kirby and his men into a fatal fight. The liquor was to dull the certainty that some of the Slash M warriors would not live through that fight. Slade Montee, more than a little drunk, finally settled it.

"We'll stay right here," he mouthed, pounding the bar, "till them skunks try to ride out. Then we'll cut 'em down! Wipe 'em out! An' a hundred dollars to the man that drops Kirby."

Murmurs of approval lifted along with the clink of glassware. Chunky Blake, who had drank very little and listened very intently, scowled as he sloshed the whisky in his glass. Cut 'em down! Wipe 'em out! That meant Whang Shannon, along with the rest. With a smile that was only a twisting of the lips, he slid along the bar to Montee.

"That's the safest way," he applauded. "But it leaves me out on a limb."

"How's that?" gruffed the Slash M boss.

"That dirty, high-withered son of a she coyote I used to pardner with is makin' his

brags how he's gonna shoot my ears off. I ain't 'akin' it. An' I ain't waitin' for no runnin' scrap in the night tuh give him his chance." His eyes lifted to the saloon clock on the backbar. It was fifteen minutes to three. "I'm givin' him fifteen minutes to load up on bottled courage so's he'll cross guns with me on the street. I'd like tuh git that word to him."

Montee scowled. "To hell with a personal duel right now! We . . ." He fell silent, a savage light glowing and growing in his tiger eyes. "Mebby that's all right, Chunky," he murmured. "Shore! Go ahead. We'll git word tuh Whang somehow. Barkeep, can't you poke over an' . . ."

"Heh, heh, heh!" A cackling laugh burst from a senile saloon hanger-on. A warped scandal-monger an' trouble maker who had worked up more than one fatal misunderstanding. "I'll carry yer message, Mister Montee. Fer a couple drinks . . . or mebby a bottle."

Montee nodded, waved him away. In a matter of minutes, he was back.

"Shannon says," he announced, rubbing his hands raspingly, "tuh tell the maggotty skinful uh bull taller an' soup-skimmin's that the only message he's got fer him is writ on the hot end of a .45 slug. Three o'clock it is, with holsters tied. Heh, heh, heh!"

Excitement surged through the Maverick Saloon. Starting with Montee, every Slash M man offered to buy Chunky a drink. He refused them all. The seconds ticked away. A silence fell over the warriors and every eye was bent upon the rotund little fighter who sat, bleak faced, at a table, and painstakingly fixed the thong on his holster. It became so quiet in the long room that each tick of the clock was like a cruel bludgeon beating out the measures of doom. Then suddenly the minute hand of the battered saloon timepiece seemed to falter. And it was three o'clock!

Chunky stood up, glanced about that ring of strained faces, nodded somberly and walked out the rear. He didn't go directly to the street, choosing, instead, to move along the alley for nearly a hundred yards before turning between buildings. Stiffly he crossed the walk, strode to the center of the street and turned with almost military precision. He raised his eyes. Opposite the Apex, Whang Shannon stood. Grim and lean. His awkwardly long arms hanging straight down. It was time to begin that fatal advance. Fighting time or dying time!

Now Chunky was moving forward with his rolling stride. And Whang was jerking ahead to meet him. A hundred yards became seventy-five. Then fifty. Seconds ticking into eternity. Sweat beaded Chunky's solemn face. Whang was grinning with the love of conflict. Twenty-five yards. Twenty. Both men sidling forward. Whang's arms still hanging straight down; Chunky's angled grotesquely for the gun stab. Fifteen yards! Ten! And both of them had stopped. Chunky was talking, so softly that the onlookers couldn't hear. That's why Chunky had walked that first hundred yards.

"You've run off at the head, feller," he hummed. "Now we'll see what you've got to back up that belly wind. One of us will drop, mebby both. But promise me this: If I go down, you ride to Ol' Matt. Montee is fixin' to wipe out the Boxed K when Kirby rides out, then he's settin' forth to run Matt outa Holster Basin. The ol' man orta know that. An' it's up to one of us."

The tall buckaroo's eyes blinked but his face was like a rock.

"It's what I was about to proposition you, Heavy-set," he confessed. "Kirby done hung Montee's boy to draw the Slash M to his guns. He's figgerin' to wipe out them snakes tonight an' then smoke Ol' Matt plumb offa Holster range. It's a go! Whichever one of us is standin' when

the smoke blows away will ride to Ol' Matt."

From the porch of the Maverick, where the Slash M men were clustered, Slade Montee's snarling voice lifted.

"What is this, you lippy trouble busters? You shore talk a good gun fight!"

A raucous laugh beat upward as nerve tension relaxed, a laugh tapering off to silence as Chunky flushed . . . and crouched.

"All ready, you long-necked grouser!" he blatted loudly. "Warm yore iron!"

His chubby hand plummeted downward and the slap against his holster leather was plainly audible. The gangling Whang matched the move, whipping out his gun with a smoothly dexterous draw. But nothing happened. Chunky didn't even jerk his gun, couldn't, to judge by his frantic efforts to dislodge the weapon.

"Well, what's holdin' you?" he demanded of the red-faced Whang. "You got me beat, ain't you? Do yore do!"

A queer look blazed in Whang's eyes and his voice reflected shame.

"I . . . I can't!" he confessed. "I . . . I forgot to load the damn thing. You got me cold, Steer-fat. Jerk yore cutter an' down me!"

"I can't free it," murmured Chunky, over a lump in his throat that throbbed. "I've got a knot in my ridin' thong. What a hell of a pair of gun fighters we turned out to be."

And then they were both laughing. Laughing that two renegade cowmen could expect seventy-five and cartridges to bust up a partnership that even death couldn't shake. That laughter had an electric effect upon the two groups on the saloon verandas. Sting Kirby's heavy voice was booming. . . .

"Spread out, boys!" he bawled. "Scatter an' show them cow-stealin', likker-swillin' Slash M's we're ready fer 'em! That slat-built Shannon has sold us out. Fog yore smoke!"

His gun spoke. With a groan, Chunky reeled and went down, a bullet through the fleshy part of his leg. Even as he fell, his gun came flashing out to spit smoke and lead at Sting Kirby. The Boxed K boss croaked, reeled and spun downward. Both ranch groups were scattering out, drawing and firing as they ran. Chunky flung himself limpingly to bowl Whang off his feet as a leaden sleet droned over them. Then the two of them were on their knees in the dust, throwing lead. Laughing as they fired. The salty sons.

"Purty good shootin', Whang," complimented Chunky, "fer a feller who forgot to load his gun."

"Yeah," grunted Whang, stuffing shells into his hot weapon. "An' some sizzlin' draw fer a boy that knotted his ridin' thong!"

All along the street, guns were blaring in battle. As the Slash M, urged on by Slade Montee's roars, engaged the leaderless Boxed K's. Dismayed by Kirby's fall, his cohorts gave back and rushed for their horses. Montee was leading his men across for a wipeout when he was tagged by a bullet with his name on it. And dropped. Whang and Chunky fought many a subsequent battle as to which one of them aimed that slug.

Then, from the west end of town, came a roar of hoofs and wild cowboy yells. A cavalcade came sweeping into Peralta, firing as they rode. The Diamond G roundup crew, led by Ol' Matt and Doc Skinner! Panic seized the riders of the two renegade outfits. Swiftly they rushed to their ponies and pounded out of town. Hurried on their way by the swift gunplay of the two trouble busting partners.

Ol' Matt Galagher came loping down the street, immune to the battle sounds about him. His faded eyes were fixed on his two "boys." Down on their knees in the dust. Holding on to one another as they talked and hoorawed and laughed a little too

hysterically to mask their emotion. Ol' Matt lit down and knelt there beside them. Neither knowing nor caring what was said. Unashamed of the tears that streaked his seamed face. Taking the blame for it all and getting it thrown right back at him. In fighting iron.

"You two kids make me feel meek an' humble," he confessed. "Doc done spread his ears fer a listenin' around here, then rode out to tell me what you was doin' fer me. I . . ."

"Who . . . me?" yelped Whang, bridling. "Like hell. I was fer whittlin' yuh into little chunks an' big 'uns. If anybody done anything fer yuh, it was Chunky."

"Don't lie, you big wallopper!" blatted Chunky. "The lesson you gotta learn is to talk more with yore hands an' less with yore big mouth. An' if you can't learn it, I'll hammer it into yore head till yo're so short a feller can't see yore buzzard neck for yore bootstraps!"

"You an' what other three cowhands?" snarled Whang, rising belligerently. "You try beatin' on my head an' I'll wrop you around a snubbin' post an' jerk out yore ears till you've got a neck like a corkscrew, you runt."

"Here's yore chance, buzzard bait!" raged Chunky, rearing up on his one good leg and swinging his gun.

Whang met him coming up, buffaloing him neatly with the long barrel of his cutter. And as Chunky fell, he sideswiped Whang with his own flashing gun. They fell together and lay still. Doc Skinner, riding up and lighting down, stared down at the unconscious pair in amazement.

"My God!" he croaked. "They just ain't human, Matt."

But the Diamond G boss was beaming. "I knowed it!" he enthused. "I knowed they'd make it up sooner or later."

"Yo're a hog for punishment, Matt," grinned the medico, glancing up the street to where townsmen clustered about the bodies of Kirby and Montee. "But I'd hate to be in your shoes."

"Howcome, Doc?"

"Them two fightin' fools has downed about all the opposition you're apt to have in this basin, Matt. Leaving nobody to battle with except themselves . . . and you. Oh well, it all makes business for me and Lord knows I cheated myself out of some in riding for you. I see Chunky's got a slug through the leg and his scalp's split. When they come out of it, fetch 'em up to the office if you ain't scairt they'll turn on you."

He turned away in mock dejection. But his pessimism failed to strike a responsive chord in Ol' Matt's breast. The old cowman had his "boys" back. There would be plenty time to round up now, what with Montee's estate being settled. And it looked like there would be a lot of range for him and his two new partners to expand in.

NO REWARD

by

CHARLES M. MARTIN

He rode into the herd waving a slicker.

They Called Him Just Plain "Fiddlin'," But When He Saw His Father Shot He Changed His Tune

Bart Kellog rode grimly across the three sections of land that made up the home pastures of the B bar K. Old Bart was small and wiry, and all his movements were fast enough to give the lie to his fifty-five years. Bulldog Bowie rode as grimly by his side; the only hired hand on the little cattle spread which at one time had counted its cattle up in the thousands. Old Bart Kellog expressed that thought when he growled at the rheumatic old cowhand.

"Not more than four-hundred head left now, Bulldog. We got to hang on to them till shippin' season for Ma an' Fiddlin'!"

"It's them dang nesters again," the old puncher answered positively. "Your gun-hand losin' it's cunning, Bart?"

The old cattleman sighed. "Times has changed some th' last few years," he explained patiently. "We got law here in Maverick county now, Bulldog. Looky; there comes that mind-readin' chip of mine!"

The cowboy sighed. "Thought for a minute you an' me was goin' to give them nesters a smokin'," he grunted. "No use trying' now, cause Fiddlin' is set on peace at any price."

The two old-timers nodded carelessly when a young cowboy spurred up on a long-legged sorrel. Fiddlin' Kellog was just turned twenty, and his blue eyes were twinkling while he pointed to the Winchesters riding under the left legs of his father and Bulldog Bowie.

"You two figger on mebbe knockin' down a buck?" he asked jokingly. "I seen a big four-pointer up in the timber yesterday."

"Yeah," Bulldog answered quickly, and hunched his heavy shoulders. "Me an' old Bart was wishin' for some fresh venison. How come you ain't done lit a shuck for th' Rockin' Chair where you're fiddlin' for th' dance tonight?"

The young cowboy stared at the old puncher intently. "I seen it in yore face, Bulldog. How come you to get yore name was because you ain't never give up an idea once it dug a furrow in yore mind. I've seen you take a thousand-pound steer an' rassle him down, startin' from yore boot-heels an' you standin' on th' ground."

"Yuh dang right," the old cowboy growled. "Now you take down in th' Cedar brakes. I've seen a dog chouse after a longhorn what had done made up its mind not to be hazed out. I've seen one of them dogs fasten onto a critter's nose, an' then run in under th' steer's front legs an' throw him for a hoolihan. That's how come bull-doggin' to get its name."

The young cowboy smiled as Bulldog attempted to change the subject. "You can't cut 'er, oldtimer," he said slowly. "You an' Bart was ridin' over to make medicine with them nesters on th' crick. Better leave well enough alone!"

"You git on about yore fiddlin'," old Bart snapped. "I'm still roddin' this spread, an' I aim to keep on doin' it while I'm alive. After that you can try yore hand."

"There's six more she-critters without calves," Bulldog interrupted. "Spring calves we ain't branded yet an' never will. Th' tracks lead over toward the nesters' crick!"

"Six, eh? I'll ride along with you," the cowboy answered quickly. "No use havin' gunplay over what might just be an accident."

The old cattleman snorted. "'Tain't no accident when six calves takes a notion to leave their mammies all to one time," he shouted angrily. "Them critters was drove off with ropes, an' me an' Bulldog aim to do our augerin' through gun-smoke if we finds them anywhere near Territory Thompson's hideout."

"That's whatever," Bulldog nodded. "Take them two worthless sons of his, an' that big Breed Coster. They drove thirty head of cattle in here two years ago when they come down from Indian Territory, but all them gents is well heeled for cash. She don't make sense, Fiddlin'!"

"I should have run 'em off th' day they squatted on th' crick," old Bart growled. "That's th' third time nesters has settled there, an' each time there has been war. Me an' Bulldog is goin' to run 'em to hell-an'-gone out of there!"

Young Fiddlin' became instantly serious. "You can't do it, oldtimer," he argued. "That land is public domain like all of us knows. You try a stunt like that an' we'll have th' U. S. Marshal in here clippin' our wings to keep us from flyin' so high!"

"Whoa up!" Bulldog muttered the words in his corded throat. "Looky yonder there!"

Old Bart Kellog raised his head and reached for the rifle under his leg. Six calves were high-tailin' it toward the alders in the creek bottom, and two riders were riding fast up ahead. The old cattleman raised the rifle and snapped a shot before the young cowboy could reach him, and one of the riders kicked his feet loose and hit

the ground running as his horse went down. Bulldog Bowie threw the hooks to his roan and pounded away as the young cowboy rode around to face his father. Old Bart snarled savagely and spurred his horse to follow Bulldog, and Fiddlin' sighed as he raced after the two old fighters.

Up ahead a wide-shouldered cowboy was kicking his left stirrup loose as a slender waddy ran alongside the plunging horse. Bulldog Bowie scratched with both feet as his roan tore straight for the pair. The slender cowboy swung up behind his heavier companion as the horse lunged forward under biting spurs. Bulldog dropped his bridle reins and shifted his feet back in the stirrups as he leaned to one side. His thick arms were spread wide when he left the saddle in a flying arc. For a moment there was a tangle of legs and arms as the horse went down under the three bodies, but Bulldog's flying tackle carried through to knock them from the saddle.

The slender cowboy did not move from where he had pitched after that savage attack. Old Bulldog came to his feet at the same time his opponent rolled like a cat, and the old cowboy's face was bright with the joy of battle. Bart Kellog fogged up on a dead run just as the heavy stranger stepped back and reached under his left arm, and the old cattleman slapped down to his right leg like a cat slapping a spool. Flame spouted from his hand almost instantly, and big Bide Thompson yelled hoarsely when the hide-out gun was jerked from his fingers.

"I'll git you for that!"

The old cattleman smiled grimly when Bide Thompson shouted the threat; whirled quickly just in time to see young Fiddlin' leave his saddle. The blue-eyed cowboy landed all spread out on the slender rider who had just tugged a pistol from his shirt, and Wildcat Thompson was really unconscious when Fiddlin' climbed to his feet and dusted himself.

"Mebbe yo're right, Dad," he said to his father. "Wildcat was just about to throw down on you with that hide-out!"

A rifle cracked spitefully back in the alders. Old Bart Kellog spun around as though jerked with a rope, and the sixgun dropped from his hand as a gushing stream of crimson spouted from his left breast. He took a staggering step backward when his hands groped blindly for some support; pitched forward on his face while hoofbeats pounded away on the other side of the creek.

Bulldog started for his horse; stopped suddenly to cover big Bide Thompson. Fiddlin' Kellog stared at his father, and his blue eyes widened with horror and grief. He was unmindful of danger when he dropped to his knees and turned the limp body over. Bide Thompson grinned like an ape while he stared at the gaping wound, and Bulldog jabbed his old single action wrist-deep in the muscled belly.

"Wipe that grin off before I gut-shoot yuh," he snarled viciously. "It was Territory Thompson that dry-gulched old Bart, an' now mebbe Fiddlin' will wake up an' give you gents yore powders!"

The big cowboy sneered. "Not him," he answered with a leer. "All he's cut out for is fiddlin' at th' dances. An' you ain't got no proof agin Territory!"

Bulldog started to answer; bit his lip when he saw the young cowboy closing the eyes of Bart Kellog. For a long moment the cowboy stared at the face of the dead, after which he reached out a brown hand and unbuckled the crossed gunbelts. Not a word did he speak when he levered to his feet and fastened the heavy belt around his lean hips; snugged the oiled holsters down on his batwings and tied the holdback strings. Eased the worn guns of a crimp before he turned slowly to face big Bide Thompson.

"I heard you," he said softly. "Step back a way an' let him fill his hand!"

"I ain't heeled," the big man growled.

"You seen yore old man shoot th' gun from my hand!"

"That there was a fatal mistake," Bulldog interrupted savagely. "He should have shot yore sneakin' heart out when you tried to throw down on him!"

Fiddlin' Kellog shuddered, and his shoulders sagged forward. The anger passed from him as quickly as it had come, and now only grief showed in his smoky eyes when he glanced at the body of his father.

"Pick up that brother of yores an' throw him across yore saddle," he said quietly to Bide Thompson. "After which you ride down to where you Thompsons is squattin', to get what you need for th' trail. You an' him get goin' or get killed, like I aim to kill that old unwashed badger that spawned both of you."

"Jest a minute, Fiddlin'," Bulldog interrupted. "We got these gents dead to rights for rustlin', an' you was talkin' about th' law jest a while back."

"We ain't lawmen," Fiddlin' answered harshly. "Likewise we ain't got no definite proof on these two. Them calves ain't been branded, an' this is public domain. Get goin', you big snake!"

"You better stick to yore fiddlin'," Bide Thompson sneered. "They busted th' mold when they made yore old man, an' right now he's toastin' his toes in hell where he's sent better men!"

Fiddlin' Kellog stared at the leering face. "Don't cut my sign," he warned softly. "I'm givin' you a chance!"

Bulldog Bowie added a grim warning of his own. "He's a chip of th' old block, an' from now on he's packin' his father's guns. Now you pick up that coyote yonder an' get long-gone before I do you a meanness. If yo're here in another minute, I'll take you apart an' scatter th' pieces all over the coulee!"

Big Bide Thompson walked over to his grazing horse and led the animal to where his brother sprawled on the filaree. There was no gentleness in his manner, when he draped the sagging form across the front of his saddle, and swung up without comment. After which he jogged across the creek bottom without speaking. He knew that old Bulldog Bowie was aching for the chance to blast a forty-five slug through his thick chest. A moment later, the old cowboy and the new ramrod of the B bar K were alone with their dead.

"Now looky, Bulldog," the young cowboy began soberly. "You rode th' Texas trails with Dad before I was born. I'm askin' you to take him back home an' see that he's fitted out for his last ride."

Bulldog twisted uneasily. "'Tain't right," he growled. "Me an' old Bart was pards, an' we rode th' river before you was foaled. You go with him to th' home ranch, cause I'm takin' up where he laid 'em down. I'll be seein' you, yearlin'!"

"He was yore pard, an' you promised to side him," the cowboy answered harshly. "You goin' to throw him down when he's needin' you for th' last time?"

"Yo're wearin' your father's guns," the old cowboy answered softly. "Was you meanin' what you said, Fiddlin'?"

Fiddlin' Kellog's hand blurred in the afternoon sunlight, and the old cowboy drew a quick breath when he stared at the gun in the right hand. Fiddlin' seldom wore a gun, but the old buckaroo was sure that old Bart had never been as fast even in his best days when they traveled the Chisum trail.

"It was Territory," the young cowboy said softly. "I'm cuttin' his sign right now. I won't leave it 'til one of us has gone to keep Bart company on his last ride."

Old Bulldog wasted no more time in argument. "Luck to you, Fiddlin'," he muttered.

Fiddlin' Kellog rowelled the tall sorrel and hit the waters of the creek in a shower of flying spray. The big horse bucked through at the unaccustomed treatment, and a flush of shame flooded the

cowboy's face while he quieted the animal with his hands. A moment later he slid from the saddle behind a clump of alders where the grass was trampled from heavy boots; stooped to pick up a gleaming shell.

"Forty-five seventy," he mumbled. "Out of an old Spencer; th' kind of saddle-gun that old varmint carries under his nigh leg!"

For a moment he studied the boot-marks; followed them with his eyes to a spot where hoof-prints showed in the loam. The soil was dug deep where the big horse had plunged under biting steel when the ambusher had taken to saddle, and Fiddlin' Kellog mounted the sorrel and followed the sign. Several times his rope-burned hands caressed the worn walnut grips of his father's guns, and a savage light changed his blue eyes to smoky gray while he followed the killer.

"He's Had A Killing Coming To Him For Quite A Spell!"

Territory Thompson! A tall lathy man of fifty-odd with the mark of killer on his mean face and in his shifty brown eyes. He had ridden into Maverick with two long guns tied down on his skinny legs, and a Spencer carbine tucked in the scabbard close to his left hand. Skinning knife in his belt on the right side, with an insolent expression of arrogance on his tanned hatchet face. Fiddlin' remembered that day two years before; remembered the thirty head of cut-backs that represented Thompson's foundation herd. Poor critters of undetermined origin, driven by heavy-shouldered Bide Thompson and the slender Wildcat; Territory Thompson's two sons.

Another rider had trotted stirrup to stirrup with the nester up ahead of the herd. Breed Coster; a thick-set man with the strength of a giant in his long muscular arms. Coster might have been anything as to breeding; Indian, Mexican, or Negro mixed with trashy white. His little black eyes watched the Kellogs as they passed the B bar K; black eyes that somehow seemed lidless like the eyes of a snake. But it was plain that he was siding Territory Thompson in whatever scheme the lanky one had in mind.

Fiddlin' remembered how old Bart and Bulldog had watched the procession wind down toward the creek. Bulldog had rubbed the grip of his gun suggestively, but the old cattleman had shaken his head.

"Chain yore wolf, Bulldog; won't be long now till fences begin to cut off th' range!"

"Fences hell," Bulldog had growled. "He can't homestead that land down there, an' squattin' should be plumb discouraged!"

The Thompsons had squatted down by the old corrals; had grazed their stock on the open range for two years. From time to time Territory Thompson and Breed Coster had ridden away to buy cheap yearlings, and the T bar T herd grew amazingly in one way or another. Many of the ranchers had their own opinions, but the Thompsons were four fighting men always heeled for battle. They never received mail; never had anything to do with the neighboring ranchers.

Fiddlin' Kellog thought of these things while he followed the winding course of the creek through the alders. His shoulders hunched forward when he caught a glimpse of Territory Thompson up ahead, and he loosened the guns in his holsters when his spurs touched the sorrel. The nester had turned a bend when the young cowboy ducked low over his horse's neck. A whirring sound came to his ears, but he had not ducked soon enough. The noose

of a rope jerked tightly against his arms when he clawed for his right-hand gun, and he was jerked from the saddle when the sorrel leaped ahead. He landed sitting with a jolt that rattled his teeth; rolled quickly with legs doubling under him for a spring. The rope jerked him back again, and a thick voice growled a savage warning behind him. The guttural voice of Breed Coster.

"Bed down before I drag you on th' end of my rope! Yonder comes th' old man to make medicine!"

Fiddlin' stopped struggling against the rope and looked up to see Territory Thompson coming down the back trail. The nester was grinning like a wolf while his right hand caressed the grip of his gun, and he stopped his horse a few feet away to leer at the prisoner.

"You lookin' for somebody down this way?" he asked.

"Snap that rope off me an' I'll take both of you," the cowboy growled angrily. "I might have knowed you'd bait a trap!"

"Yeah," the nester agreed with a grin. "An' me an' Breed knowed you'd come flounderin' into it like a yearlin' bull on th' prod. You sit still before I drill you center!"

"You killed old Bart! Killed him without givin' him a show while you hid in th' brush!"

"Bart dead? That there's too bad," Territory drawled. "But that old He had a killin' comin' to him for quite a spell. Always gittin' up on his hind laigs an' clawin' for his smoke-poles. Wonder he lived as long as he did!"

"I cut yore sign an' read it plain," Fiddlin' answered more quietly. "You'll stop a slug or stretch rope for that, you damn rustler!"

The rope flipped from his arms and tightened about his neck, and Breed Coster hip-leaned against the twine to jerk the cowboy down like a strangled calf. Fiddlin' struggled to tear the noose from his neck, and black spots danced before his eyes as his strength left him. His lungs ached for air, and his tongue began to sag from his mouth. A curtain of darkness closed about him to blot out consciousness. He struggled weakly when cold water splashed in his face; ripped a hand down to his gun when he saw the nester watching him with a sneering smile. His hand clawed air above the empty holster, and he rocked back on his shoulders when a heavy fist smashed against his cracked lips.

"Work him over, Breed!"

Fiddlin' Kellog rolled weakly on his side and staggered to his feet when he saw the trap. Territory Thompson had turned Breed on him to break his spirit; had shucked the guns from his holsters while he was unconscious. His father's guns that he had strapped on his own hips when he had taken an oath to hunt down the killer.

Breed Coster was facing him with long arms reaching for a grip; black eyes staring without blinking. The cowboy leaped forward and jabbed with his left to bob that leering face back on thick neck; brought his right across to mash the sneering lips against yellow teeth. Ordinarily the blow would have felled an ox, but the cowboy was weak and shaken from strangulation. Breed Coster shook his head and spat a tooth from his bloody mouth; weaved in without stepping back from the blow. Fiddlin' retreated until his back touched a rock, and Coster growled with triumph.

"Got yuh! Comin' fer yuh, Fiddler!"

The tall cowboy tried to side step; lashed out with both fists when the Breed blocked escape. The long arms closed around him like ropes, and the breath was jerked from his lungs when something snapped in his side. Breed Coster growled like a gorilla while he tightened his arms, and once more Fiddlin' Kellog began to sag.

He loosened the straining muscles of his

shoulders and arms; lunged forward like a wild bull in that precious half-second of release before the Breed could tighten his hold. The cowboy growled like a bear when his right fist crashed against the outthrust jaw; struck again with all his strength when the Breed roared with pain. His head cleared as the breath flooded back in his aching lungs, and his right hand pawed down and came away from Breed Coster's belt with one of his father's guns in his fist.

The Breed shook his head and charged in with eyes glowing red; that deep changing red seen only in the eyes of killers. Fiddlin' tried to side-step; gasped when the thick hairy arms closed around him like coiling snakes. The sixgun sank deep in the killer's belly; roared twice in muffled echoes as Fiddlin' dropped the thumbed-back hammer.

The thick arms fell slowly away from him when big Breed slumped to the ground. The smell of burning cloth mingled with the salt of fresh-spilled blood when Breed Coster crashed to the ground.

Fiddlin' threw himself to the ground behind the threshing hulk as his eyes caught the glint of metal, and he heard the thud of Territory Thompson's bullet batter its way through Breed's muscled back. Breed twitched and became still, and the cowboy rolled to his feet when the drum of hoofs rattled from down the creek. The lanky nester was dogging it with bloody hooks biting the flanks of his horse, and the tall cowboy sagged to the ground while his breath whistled back into his starved lungs.

Twice he raised his arm and tried to line his sights on the fleeing man, but each time the heavy gun sagged down as curtains of hazy fog swirled before his eyes. A deep throbbing pain in his side made him grit his teeth where the broken rib burned like a branding iron, and Fiddlin' Kellog rested until the strength flowed back into his young body. He stared at the bulk of Breed Coster without emotion; closed his eyes when he saw the great gaping wound where his bullets had tunneled to free him from certain death.

"I got to get up," he muttered. "He shot old Bart down without givin' him a show!"

He staggered to his feet and turned the body of Breed Coster over; leaned down and retrieved his other gun from the broad belt. Then he thumbed fresh cartridges through the loading gate of his right-hand gun and snugged both weapons down in the leather. His blue eyes were smoky when he picked up his shapeless Stetson and jammed it down on his tousled head; whistled for his sorrel and pulled himself up to the high saddle. His hands patted the worn grips of his father's guns when he turned the sorrel toward the corrals of Territory Thompson.

Fiddlin' Kellog blinked his eyes when he skirted the creek-bottom where the pole corrals of the Thompson claim stood out in bleached whiteness against the dusk of twilight. A trail-herd was bawling through the gloom up ahead, and the shouts of several riders at point and swing echoed back through the little hollow. The drag was being shoved across the creek by two riders, and the eyes of Fiddlin' grew smoky with the smothered flames of anger. He could make out the familiar blaze-faces of B bar K cattle bringing up the van; could recognize the bulk of Bide Thompson and the slender grace of Wildcat.

His calloused palms slapped wood as he half-drew his sixguns; let them slog back in the scabbards when his narrowed eyes turned to scan the weather-beaten shack that served the Thompsons as bunk house. The drag was disappearing over the rise with the two brothers flipping the ends of their ropes, and Territory Thompson came out of the shack with bulging saddlebags over his arm. A fresh horse was anchored near the door with trailing reins; slicker pack and blankets rolled behind the cantle. Territory Thompson and his

thieving sons were hitting the trail for Indian Territory where cattle brought good prices and no questions asked.

Fiddlin' Kellog was on the ground creeping through the gloom toward the bunk house. He melted with the shadows of the trees until he reached the clearing by the creek; ran swiftly across the grass roots when the lanky rustler went back in the shack for more plunder. The tall cowboy was braced on his boot-heels when Territory Thompson clattered through the door with two canvas sacks in his hands. The sacks thudded to earth with a chinking noise as the rustler opened his fingers and allowed them to fall. His brown eyes were slitted and deadly, and tinged at the corners with fear as he faced the man he was sure he had killed.

"You killed old Bart, you murderin' rustler," the cowboy whispered hoarsely. Whispered because even the night insects seemed to whisper at twilight. "You laid back in th' brush an' lined yore sights on his heart without rattlin' no warnin' whatever. I taken up for th' old man where he laid 'em down. Make yore pass—for one time out in th' open!"

"Yeah; I killed him," Territory answered viciously. "He run me out of Texas twenty years ago. He put a slug through my off shoulder that night, an' I swore to git him if it took a lifetime."

Fiddlin' nodded his head as recognition came. "Only th' name was Tungston then," he said softly. "That was th' night I was born, an' you was runnin' off a herd of B bar K stuff when old Bart caught up with you. He'd have killed you that night, only he . . . he was expecting me to come bawlin' into th' home corral. I come that night, an' I come down here now to catch you doggin' it agin!"

A flash of white warned him in the gloom ten paces way. Territory was striking down for his guns; ivory handled forty-fives that disappeared suddenly when lean brown hands wrapped around the grips and rasped against leather on the up-pull. Fiddlin' Kellog dropped his right hand and twitched his shoulder forward; slapped wood as his wrist threw off in an arc to spill the long-barrelled Peacemaker across the lip of his holster. His calloused thumb fanned the heavy hammer as his fist cradled against his lean hip.

Red flame painted his crouched figure briefly before black powder-smoke snuffed out the gun-light, and the tall cowboy threw himself sideways as he caught the bucking gun with steely wrist and threw down for a chopping shot. The bullet from the rustler's gun fanned the space where the cowboy had stood; the muzzle-bloom lined the sagging figure against the black of the bunk house. The nester grunted and fell when the second shot shocked him to his haunches, and Fiddlin' Kellog shifted his position again and crouched forward above his smoking gun.

The tall cowboy stared at the still figure for a moment while his thumb automatically fed fresh cartridges through the loading gate of his Colt. Then he picked up the canvas sacks; whistled at the weight of the silver and gold. A moment later he cached them under a log and mounted his horse to follow the B bar K cattle in the drag of the T bar T trail-herd.

Fiddlin' Kellog's left hand reached behind his saddle and fumbled with the saddle-strings that held his slicker when he saw the trail-herd skylined up ahead. Cutting in from the side, he waved the crackling slicker and charged among the weary cattle with sixgun blazing in his right hand. Gun-fire broke out up ahead where several cowboys were riding point and swing, but Fiddlin' paid no attention as he boogered the herd into a mad stampede of bawling, trampling flight.

A sixgun flamed behind him, and he lurched forward across the sorrel's neck when the slug snicked the point of his left shoulder. His gun roared twice at the flash, and he saw the slender rider pitch

from his horse when the bellowing longhorns charged forward with hocks rattling like muffled drums. Another rider was galloping toward him from the drag, and the tall cowboy snarled in his throat when the hammer of his gun clicked on an empty shell.

Three times he heard the whine of slugs as the thick-chested rider blasted at him through the darkness. His smoke-burned face twisted into a grin when he heard the hammer snapping down on harmless brass, and he dug the hooks to the sorrel and charged to meet big Bide Thompson who had wheeled his horse in an attempt to reload his gun. The big rustler saw his danger too late when Fiddlin' Kellog stood up in the oxbows and hurled himself from his rushing horse with arms spread wide. His hard body hit Bide like a bull-dogger rasslin' his ox, and big Bide Thompson was torn from his hull to land on his back with the tall cowboy on top of him.

Fiddlin' Kellog ducked his shoulder to complete the roll; came to his feet with a wild yell as he threw himself forward and down to grapple with his enemy. His hands reached for a hold; relaxed almost instantly when he felt no resistance. He turned wearily as a group of horsemen loped up to surround him.

"Don't shoot! It's Fiddlin'!"

The voice of Bulldog Bowie bellowing out of the fog. The tall cowboy caught the glimpse of silver badges; that would be the sheriff of Maverick and his deputies. When Fiddlin' spoke, his voice was choked with suppressed emotion.

"Them Tungstons is all done for, sher'ff. All four of 'em!"

"You said th' Tungstons?" the sheriff shouted. "There's a thousand apiece on all four of 'em for robbery an' killin' up Kansas way. An' twenty percent for recovery of twenty thousand dollars loot took in a bank hold-up!"

Fiddlin' Kellog staggered with weariness. "I don't want no blood money," he answered huskily. "Give it to th' widows of them men what was killed in th' hold-up. I got th' money hid away safe down by the cabin!"

"That money is different, Fiddlin'," Bulldog interrupted. "How much is twenty percent of twenty thousand, sher'ff?"

"Four thousand bucks," the sheriff answered. "Enough to set th' B bar K back up in business. I'll see that Fiddlin' gets it. Now I got to take these corps back to Maverick."

"Jest a minute, sher'ff," Bulldog shouted. "You see what Fiddlin's wearin'?"

"He ain't wearin' much clothes after all that skull-duggery," the sheriff answered dryly. "What's he wearin' perticular?"

"His Father's Guns," the old cowboy whispered reverently. "Old Bart is restin' easy now, sher'ff. We'll be seein' you!"

BILL STILES

This picture was posed expressly for this article by Bill Stiles. It shows the old outlaw as he looks today at the age of 85.

ALIAS BILL CHADWELL

by BILL STILES

LAST SURVIVOR OF THE JAMES GANG

AS TOLD TO ED EARL REPP

A Stirring Six-Gun Echo Of The Owl-Hoot Trail, In Which Bill Stiles, Last Survivor Of The Jesse James Gang, Tells For The First Time Who The Notorious Bill Chadwell Was

From the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico, Bill Chadwell—horse thief, rustler, two-gunman, train robber and member of what was probably the wildest and most successful band of outlaws in American history, the Jesse James Gang—was one of the most reckless and daring badmen I ever knew.

But in spite of what written history claims, Bill Chadwell was not his real name and I doubt very much if there is another person living today, outside of myself, able to reveal his true identity. It is very likely that there will be attempts made to discredit my claims, but they will not annoy me in the least.

I knew Bill Chadwell, as he was known, perhaps better than his mother and father. I knew him at his best as well as at his worst. It is doubtful if his own parents knew that he was their son or they would have stepped forward to claim his body after A. R. Manning killed him during our raid on the Northfield Bank in Minnesota on September 6th, 1876.

N. H. Rose

A. R. MANNING

Hardware merchant of Northfield, Minnesota, who killed Bill Chadwell. Until this article was printed it was thought that Chadwell and Stiles were one and the same.

Bill Chadwell and I were close cronies before Manning's slug cut him down. I do not lament his passing. It was a just reward for his deviltry.

I was on the dodge for everything from horse stealing to stage robbing, when I met Bill Chadwell in 1874 just outside of Stillwater in Washington County, Minnesota. Rewards totaling about $10,000 were posted for me dead or alive in various parts of the West.

Like myself, Chadwell was dodging the law. He was being hunted for a killing in Minneapolis, the latest of his long series of crimes. We met in a small saloon almost in the shadow of the Stillwater Prison walls. It was a known hideout for criminals, conducted on the theory that the last place the law would be likely to look for a man was within a stone's throw of a prison.

That theory was blasted when two Pinkerton detectives trailed me there. When I entered the place, they were, unknown to me, not more than a hundred feet behind me.

They followed almost on my heels and it was Bill Chadwell who saved me from certain arrest.

When I entered the saloon only two men were there. One was Bill Chadwell and the other was a hard-eyed bartender. Bill, I noticed on first glance, was wearing two pearl-handled .44's, strapped low down on his thighs, a sure sign of a professional gunman. He was standing at the end of the bar, facing the door, as if waiting for the arrival of some lawman to attempt taking him.

I strode up to the bar, ordered a soda pop—I never drank heavy liquor—and was sipping at it when the two Pinkertons walked in. I saw them out of the tail of my eye, knew from the way they dressed that they were detectives. But I never dreamed they were after me, for I had never gone against the law in that part of the country up to that time. I had ranged generally toward Omaha and down to El Paso. Beyond giving them a casual once-over, I paid no attention to them until they walked up and stood on either side of me.

BILL CHADWELL GOES INTO ACTION

Something hard jammed into my ribs. At first I thought the fellow on my right was merely elbowing me. But when I tried to shove him away and caught a glimpse of a .44, I knew that the law had finally caught up with Mrs. Stiles' boy, William.

The detective on my left jingled a pair of wrist-irons.

"Hands on the bar, Stiles!" he commanded, neither of them paying the slightest attention to the hunted killer standing near. "One false move will be your last!"

There was nothing left for me to do but comply. I was wearing two .44's, thonged down. But the law was standing so close to me that I could not have reached them without fouling my arms. Besides, I knew that the instant I tried going for my guns, that .44 in my right ribs would blast me.

My hands hit the bar reluctantly. The bartender scowled at the officers and nodded darkly at Bill Chadwell, who was taking in the proceedings with a frown. The detective started cuffing my left wrist, but that was as far as he got.

In the mirror behind the bar I saw Bill Chadwell go into action. I had no idea who or what he was, but his pearl-handled .44's seemed to leap into his hands. Before the Pinkertons knew it, he had them covered.

"I'm takin' a hand in this deal, you flat-feet!" he flung at them. "You let that fellow go, you hear me?"

Pinkerton jaws dropped. The detective on my left ceased cuffing me. The man on my right jammed his .44 a little deeper.

"You keep out of this, mister!" he shot back at Chadwell. "This is a pinch and if you insist upon obstructing justice, we'll take you along, too!"

"Like hell you will!" Chadwell hissed,

and I could see the knuckles of his trigger fingers grow white as he squeezed down. "I'm giving you bulls just thirty seconds to get out! See? And you're going without Stiles! Is that clear?"

It was! The look in his deep blue eyes was all that the Pinkertons, not endowed with an overamount of guts, needed to see that he meant business. They must have guessed that it was another case of criminal helping criminal. And it was. The .44 went from my ribs. The cuffs were taken from my wrist. In less than thirty seconds those two detectives were on their way out, leaving their guns and bracelets on the bar as Chadwell commanded.

As they vanished furiously through the swinging doors, he gave them a derisive horse-laugh, holstered his guns and stepped forward. We shook hands over the incident. He had saved me unquestionably from the rope or a long stretch in the pen at least. I was mighty grateful and the first drink of whisky I ever had, was swallowed with him. I never learned how the Pinkertons came to get on my trail. Possibly they had taken it up somewhere in Nebraska and had not caught up with me until I reached Stillwater.

And so that's how I met Bill Chadwell, which, as I have already stated, was not his name. Through underworld channels he had heard of me. I was a rip-snorting two-gunner with an unsavory reputation from Omaha to El Paso, just the type of man he thought would do to ride the river with. He was looking for a pal. So was I. Both were tired of lone-wolfing it. We took to each other right off.

N. H. Rose

BILL CHADWELL

This picture was taken in 1876 just after the citizens of Northfield, Minnesota, had killed him. Note bullet hole in chest.

He was about my own age—twenty-four. If I remember correctly, I believe he told me he had been born in 1850, the same year I was, but he was six or seven months older. He weighed in the neighborhood of 160 pounds while I tipped at 145. We were the same height—five-nine. He was about as handsome an outlaw as I'd ever met, with dark brown hair, clean-cut features and broad shoulders. He was the type of fellow you like right off, being quick to smile and friendly. He appeared to be well-bred, had an excellent command of the English language, and would have fitted into any drawing room,

minus his big guns, spurs and linsey-woolsey, of course.

STILES AND CHADWELL BECOME PARDNERS

We took to each other like ducks to water and before long we were exchanging confidences. No time was wasted getting out of that saloon.

"Them two bulls will be coming back in a hurry, Bill," he warned me over our hand-shake. "We better pull out. I've got a camp out in the jungles. Come on along and we'll talk things over."

We left hastily. Our horses were anchored beside a hitch-rack outside. Before the Pinkertons had time to round up assistance and return, we were riding fast.

His camp was in the brakes on the bank of a narrow creek about ten miles out from Stillwater. It consisted only of a few blankets, a cache of ammunition for his guns and some tinned food. Around our fire that night he told me many things.

Among them were the details of the killing with which he was charged and for which he was being hunted. Not long before, he had taken a girl to the Merchants' Hotel in Minneapolis. She was a well-known society girl at that time, young and beautiful. He told me her name. I forget what it was. At any rate, he insisted that she had gone to the hotel with him voluntarily. He was handsome enough to lure a girl that way, I might put in.

They spent the night together. But according to his statements, and I believe him, he left the room before dawn. At that time, the girl was alive and in good health. But when the maid came finally to clean up the room, she found the girl dead in bed, virtually beaten to death.

Having registered as Bill Chadwell, he was forthwith charged with her murder. He took an oath to me that he did not kill her, that he had not as much as said an unkind word to her during their visit.

Nevertheless, he was being hunted for the crime and it hurt him to be charged with the killing of a girl. Perhaps it was his injured pride that caused him to confess his real identity to me. He was in the mood to talk that evening.

One of the first things he told me was that he was a member of the Jesse James band. That took my breath away and I was inclined to doubt him until he promised to get me into the gang. He did that, eventually, and we were to ride together with Jesse and Frank James until Manning killed him as we stood side-by-side fighting the enraged citizens of Northfield.

"My name ain't Bill Chadwell," he told me moodily. "I just use it here so as not to disgrace my family. I wouldn't want them to know what kind of a bird I am. They've done everything to keep me straight and my old man is considered the richest man in Minnesota. Why, Bill, he owns more timber in the Big Woods than anybody else. He's got stores and lumber mills in St. Paul, Minneapolis and other places. There's a whole county in Minnesota named after him—Stevens County!"

"You mean your name is Bill Stevens, then?"

"Not Bill," he confided, "but Alvin. My real name is Alvin Stevens, but all the money my folks have doesn't seem to be enough to keep me straight. It ain't the money I like. It's the thrill of getting it behind a gun!"

I knew what that meant. The thrill of riding the owl hoot trail! It was in my blood. It was in Alvin Stevens, alias Bill Chadwell, alias Bill Chadwick and frequently alias Bill Stiles! More times than I can possibly name, he masqueraded as Bill Stiles, which resulted in the side tracking of history at Northfield. There, as I have said before, his body was erroneously identified as mine, causing many historians to write in their books that I was dead.

In several of my articles in this magazine covering members of the James and Younger gangs with whom I rode from

1875 until the James band was disbanded by Jesse's death at the hands of Bob Ford and the treachery of Dick Liddil in 1882, I have referred to Bill Chadwell, or Alvin Stevens, simply as the son of a rich Minnesota merchant. I felt reluctant to give out his real identity.

But I am 85 years of age now and may embark on the Great Adventure any time. History cannot be corrected by a dead man. I feel that I should tell all that I know now of the old outlaw life of myself and my owl-hoot associates so that history might be aided rather than denied the facts that I alone, as the last known survivor of the James Gang, am able to furnish. When I'm gone, as far as I know, there will be nobody living able to tell first hand the inside facts of possibly the greatest outlaw band of them all—the James Band.

That may sound somewhat like bragging, but take it from me, friends, a man doesn't brag when he's 85 and has one leg and half the other in the grave!

Personally, I don't like to tell of the old days. I've tried to forget. But history that I know from having played a part in it makes so many glaring mistakes that I feel the least I can do before I go on that last roundup is to help establish it on the right trail.

I did not doubt Chadwell's story of his identity when he told it to me. Later on I came to know both his mother and his father, but they never knew that their son, Alvin, was the notorious killer, robber and rustler, Bill Chadwell, as history knows him.

For about eight months after Bill and I joined up as partners in plunder, we rode the owl-hoot trail through Minnesota and Wisconsin. During that time, he told me, the James Gang was campaigning in Kentucky and Tennessee. He had not gone with them on this trip for the reason that he had been shot in the left thigh and had been in no condition for the long ride when they departed.

It was while they were riding in the South that they staged the famous Gallatin, Columbia and Russellsville robberies. I am unable to offer a first hand account of those raids, but I can volunteer certain information about one member of the band that is unknown or has been completely overlooked by historians, that is, as far as his connections with Jesse James are concerned.

BILL LONGLEY WAS A MEMBER OF THE JAMES GANG

That man was none other than Bill Longley, the notorious Texas gunman.

Bill Longley was in the Jesse James Gang under the name of Bill Sanders. Much has been written about this killer. His career in Texas is well known. But nothing is known generally of his career with the James outfit. I knew him well; had met him in El Paso along with Wes Hardin, the Manning brothers, Sam Bass, George Scarborough, Bass Outlaw, John Selman and that grand old ex-ranger, Captain Jim Gillette, who is still alive and who may or may not remember me.

Anyway, Bill Longley was a full-fledged member of the Jesse James band and left it only because a lawman's bullet caught up with him during the raid in Russellsville, Fentress County, Ky. He was still with the band when they returned to Missouri, but was taking no active part in the raids because of his injury.

We were in Minnesota, Bill Chadwell and I, when he led me into the woods not far from Northfield where the outlaws had a camp. I don't recall the exact date of my initiation into the James Gang at that camp, but it was late in 1875. Bill Longley was there when Chadwell introduced me to the James boys, Jesse and Frank, and the balance of the bunch, Charley Pitts, Clell Miller and the Younger Broth-

ers, Cole, Bob and Jim. All of them were there, having been together during the campaign in the South.

I hardly knew Bill Longley when I saw him. He was in pretty bad shape, being little more than skin and bones from hard travel when he should have been in a hospital bed. He was wanted in Texas for a half dozen killings. His guns were notched. He was a hard hombre and looked it even in spite of his emaciated aspect.

Jesse and Frank were for putting him in a hospital, but he refused until the very last when plans were laid for the robbery of a bank at Corydon, Iowa. For his own health, the leaders persuaded him to recuperate in a farmhouse in the vicinity before resuming active work. He finally yielded and we went with him to the home of some James sympathizers where we left him. I took his place in the James-Younger combination and never saw him again.

From what I learned later, he remained only several weeks at the farmhouse before saddling his horse one morning to ride south. The last I heard of him came via grapevine from Texas. He had been hanged.

Chadwell had no trouble establishing me in the gang, but he did some fast talking to prove to the desperadoes that I was a hard case. I might take pride in the fact that Jesse had heard quite a bit about me. But there can be no pride in such a misspent life. I was taken into the gang with little ceremony and ordered to ready my horse for a long ride.

Like most of the Jesse James holdups, the raid on the Corydon Bank was pulled without a hitch. History claims that only seven men took part in the robbery. That is wrong. There were nine—the same band that was to raid Northfield not long afterward on the following September 6th.

The gang landed on the outskirts of Corydon the day prior to the robbery. The next morning the whole bunch was in town, waiting for the bank to open its doors at ten o'clock. At that moment the band mounted and rode hell-bent up the main street, shooting at everything in sight. It was the usual procedure. The wild firing generally terrorized the citizens and cleared the street, giving us practically a free hand.

Corydon's main stem was deserted with the first round. The poor people were so frightened that they never thought of resisting. Besides, word flew through town that Jesse James was making a raid. His reputation for killing sent them scurrying behind closed doors.

Thundering up to the bank, Jesse, Frank and Cole dismounted and rushed inside. There they terrorized the clerks. With six .44's aimed at their heads they could do nothing but comply with the outlaws' demands. The vaults were flung open without a shot being fired inside the bank. While Frank and Cole kept the staff covered, Jesse filled a couple of money bags with cash and currency. In the neighborhood of $40,000 was taken.

The gang rode out of town triumphantly. A posse was hastily thrown together to pursue us. But we out-rode and outfought it for about fifteen miles. Then the citizens gave up and returned to town. This brings us to something else history does not record.

With the abandoning of the chase by the posse, the gang halted in the timber to rest. For three or four days we lay up in a hidden camp, looking after our horses and in general making ready for another long ride.

After we had rested, the gang split up in pairs, with orders from the leaders to meet at a certain spot just west of Corydon. We all returned to that town and spent a whole day spending some of its own money! None of us were recognized and we even talked with men who had been in the posse!

Bill Chadwell and I were paired off. In

the general store we replenished our ammunition. I bought a new rifle to take the place of my other one whose stock had been split by either a wild bullet or one deliberately fired at me during our get-away.

Shortly after making these purchases, we repaired to a saloon where Chadwell got into a gunfight with two men who thought they were tough. They were boasting of what they would do to any one of the James boys if they ever got the chance. Chadwell called their hands. It was near sundown anyway, and we were to meet the rest of the bunch an hour after sunset.

"All I ask," one of the tough ones was saying to a group of awed listeners at the bar, "is a chance to unlimber on one of them damn robbers! I'd let daylight in him so fast he wouldn't know what hit him."

"You said it, Steve," said his companion, fingering his .44 significantly. "We could take the whole James gang in one chunk and swaller it with a beer chaser!"

Chadwell and I were standing alone at the end of the bar. Bill had about one sheet in the wind, while I was strictly sober.

N. H. Rose

WILLIAM LONGLEY
Famous Texas gunman, revealed here for first time as a member of James gang.

"Listen to that jasper talk, Bill!" he grinned. "Making a big show! I'll bet you a hundred dollars they'd crawl if I told 'em I was a James boy!"

He nudged me.

"Better not, Bill," I warned. "They look tough. I'd like to take 'em on myself, but Jesse might get sore if we start a ruckus."

"More likely he'd want us to shut up these two fellers," Bill growled, "and that's what I'm gonna do!"

Hitching his brace of pearl-handled .44's around into a more handy position, he strutted into the group and elbowed his way up to the biggest and toughest of the pair of braggarts.

"What's that you been sayin', hombre?" he demanded. "Did I hear you say you'd take the whole James bunch in one chunk?"

"Yuh heard me right, stranger," the fellow growled. "Ef I was sheriff o' this county, they wouldn't have robbed the bank here! Not by a dang sight!"

With his usual recklessness, Chadwell tilted back his head and laughed derisively, as he had laughed the day he rescued me from the two Pinkertons. The big man,

towering over him by half a head, scowled. I kept my eyes on his companion, a florid-faced gunman who I felt would jump in at the first hint of trouble.

That trouble came like a lightning bolt. Chadwell was just mean enough and reckless enough to suddenly slap the big man across the mouth with the back of his hand.

Now let me say that Chadwell had a hefty wallop behind a slap like that. The big fellow staggered back. Instantly the crowd broke and fled. Within twenty seconds that saloon was empty save for the two gunmen, Chadwell, myself and the bartender.

I expected to see Chadwell get himself killed here. But Bill was not ready to die. As he slapped the big man's face he leaped aside and went for his guns. The two also went, but they were no match for Chadwell. His .44's were out and shooting.

"I'm one of the James gang!" he yelled. "Now let's see you two put daylight into me!"

The pair had no chance. But Bill did not kill them. He had just yearned to put the fear of God and the James Gang into their hearts. His guns exploded as one. And I never saw such fancy shooting before or since. It is still a mystery to me that he did not miss their ears and plant his slugs in their skulls.

But he didn't! As neat as you please he shot an ear off each one of them, his bullets smashing a big mirror behind the bar! Blood spurted. Panic seized two hearts. The pair picked up their heels and fled through a rear door and as far as I know they may be running yet.

Chadwell was a dead shot with either gun. Always during quiet moments in camp he was practicing the draw. I've seen him place two tin cans in opposite directions, then walk between them until he was almost in the middle. Out would leap his guns and he would shoot from the hips. Invariably he scored on both targets, shooting in two directions at one time.

I doubt very much if the famous Wes Hardin could have beaten him either on the draw or at straight shooting. Bill was tricky, had absorbed much gun-wisdom. But he was not as blood-thirsty as Hardin and therefore did not earn as sanguine a reputation. But if I had been called upon to wager on one or the other of them, I'd have bet my money on Chadwell to win. I've seen Wes Hardin in action. Despite what writers say, he wasn't so fast on the draw. I saw him in Abilene. I believe the man he killed was named Ben Hinds, a professional gambler. Both were mere kids and Hardin was known then as "Seven-Up." In my opinion he earned his reputation by shooting negroes in Texas—from behind.

I also knew the man who finally killed Hardin. His name was John Selman who was a police officer in El Paso. Even Selman could not have exchanged lead with Bill Chadwell and lived. That is my opinion, of course, and people may disagree. All I can say is that I've seen Chadwell as well as the others in action. Not many people living today can claim that privilege.

THE BANK AT ST. GENEVIEVE, MISSOURI

However, Bill and I left town immediately and met the balance of the gang. I have related in another article how Belle Starr, Queen of American Outlaws, furnished us with information as to shipments of cash and gold. Well, Belle had sent Jesse news of such a shipment to the St. Genevieve Bank in Missouri.

Belle was in Chicago fraternizing with Wells-Fargo officials, Pinkertons and the big-wigs able to give her the tips we needed to make our raids successful. How she obtained the dope on the St. Genevieve job I don't know. But as usual she must have *vamped* the details from some official. That was her way of getting what she wanted when on an information-seeking

tour. At other times, her guns spoke as loud as any other member of the James Gang. But for a long time she was the brains behind the brains of the gang, in spite of what anyone else may say about it. *I know, for I was there!* I saw her in our camps. I talked with her.

So leaving Corydon behind we lined out for Missouri, reaching St. Genevieve in late spring. I have a poor memory for dates, but I remember St. Genevieve as being a place of mud. It must have been spring, for it was still pretty chilly. I believe it was in 1876. I'm not positive, although our next raid was to be Northfield. That was in September of '76 and Bill Chadwell was destined to bite the dust there.

If I remember correctly, St. Genevieve was a Catholic town. The people spoke a mixture of French and English. But we were interested only in the bank which Belle had informed us contained about $100,000 in gold. Perhaps it did, but the leaders only removed about $10,000 from the vault.

And we lost most of that because as we rode out of town the money bag broke open, spilling coins into the mud. Jesse was carrying the loot, but we made no attempt to retrieve the fallen coins. The reason was that a dozen men were on our tails. We fought them back finally and rode away. I believe the gang got less than $8,000 actual cash here, having lost a couple of thousand out of the bag.

Pinkertons got on our tails outside of St. Genevieve and we had to ride far and hard to evade them. Finally we wound up in a camp about twenty miles from Northfield. There the leaders made plans to rob the bank in that town. It was Indian summer now and we were all broke, more or less.

Finally Jesse called Chadwell to his side and ordered him to go on a scouting trip into Northfield.

"You rack over to Northfield, Bill," I heard him command. "Look over the bank there. Find out how many men will be left inside when the crew goes out to lunch, then come back here. And remember this, Chadwell! Get drunk on this job and I'll gun-whip some sense into you!"

Jesse never wasted time on preliminaries. His commands were direct and to the point. When he spoke his eyes, sometimes light brown and sometimes as dark as shoe-buttons, and the heavy black beard he wore on occasions, danced with a peculiar light that warned a man that his health depended upon his ability to carry out orders to the proverbial T.

None of us knew that better than Chadwell. There was no arguing back, no bickering; no refusals to comply. So Bill hastened on his errand and in Northfield used the name of Bill Stiles. He went straight to a saloon opposite the bank from where he could keep an eye on the comings and goings of the staff. He announced himself in the saloon as Bill Stiles and the name stuck, accounting for the side-tracking of history after the smoke of the pending battle cleared.

Late that evening he returned to camp with a favorable report. Jesse had him sketch in the camp-dust a map of the bank and the lay of the streets about it. Then Jesse himself poked a finger on the spots where the rest of us were to take up our posts. In plotting a raid, he was like a field marshal planning a campaign of battle. He drilled us before every job and we knew at all times exactly where one or the other of us was to be in case of trouble. Each man had his particular part to play. Nothing could go wrong. So we thought.

THE NORTHFIELD BANK ROBBERY

But something did go wrong in Northfield. Whether or not Chadwell had inadvertently dropped a hint of the pending raid in the saloon, nobody knows.

The way I see it now, he must have made a mistake in posing as Bill Stiles, for it was

generally known by this time that I was a member of the band. Probably he thought Northfield was unaware of it. That is the only explanation I can offer for the town being ready for us when we began our raid on the bank the following day, September 6th, 1876.

Early the next morning we headed for town, riding as fine horse flesh as could be found anywhere. Mostly Kentucky thoroughbred stock. At about noon we arrived and staked ourselves out at designated spots about the bank. We did not know it, but behind closed doors men lurked with rifles, ready to fire upon us as soon as the raid on the bank began.

But by riding into town in casual fashion in singles and pairs, we reached our stake-outs before the armed and waiting citizens led by A. R. Manning, H. M. Wheeler and Jim Hyde knew it. Manning, a hardware merchant, according to history, *killed me.* Instead, he killed Bill Chadwell *alias Bill Stiles!*

However, in town I took up my position on a corner directly opposite the bank. Bob and Jim Younger appeared on another corner, Charley Pitts casually roweled up to the front of a store nearby, dismounted and began fumbling with his cinches. Bill Chadwell and Clell Miller came strolling along stiff-leggedly from another direction, having left their horses in front of a hotel half a block away.

Then Jesse, Frank and Cole swung up toward the bank. Without the slightest betrayal of excitement they anchored their horses and strode casually inside. As I remember it, the bank was the main building in what was known as Bridge Square.

I glanced at the sun. It was just past noon. The leaders had not been inside the bank more than a minute before I heard several shots from there, muffled by the walls. We learned later that Jesse had unlimbered on A. H. Bunker and Joseph Heywood, bank officials on duty.

Just then a man came out of a building next door and started into the bank. At one glance he saw what was taking place, turned, and fled, yelling his head off. Before we could get in a shot at him he was gone around a corner. We could hear him yelling wildly that the bank was being robbed.

Time dragged. Our guns were out and ready. Then hell broke loose in Northfield. The man had aroused the town with his screaming. Three horsemen came charging up toward the bank, shooting at everything in sight. I knew they were not members of the gang, for we had been ordered to cause no disturbance until the leaders emerged from the bank.

These three men proved to be El Stacy, Ross Phillips and James Gregg. Hearing the shooting, our leaders bounced out of the bank, pistols drawn. Jesse promptly fired at the three riders. Cole and Frank joined in. Those three worthies promptly flung themselves from their mounts and ran for cover like frightened jackrabbits.

From windows and doors lead began spraying us. I dodged behind a rain barrel and fired back. Through the gunsmoke I saw Jesse and Frank James and Cole Younger standing in front of the bank, pouring lead into buildings about them. Stacy, Ross and Gregg opened up on them from a store window.

Just about then a half dozen men came running toward the bank, firing as they ran. Among them were citizens Wheeler, Manning and Hyde. Also there were City Marshal Hobbs and a Judge Streeter.

With their backs to the wall, our three leaders began pouring lead into that howling, shooting mob.

"Give 'em hell!" I heard Jesse bellow above the din of cracking rifles, shotguns and horse pistols. "Shoot their damned eyes out!"

Firing like a madman he sent the attackers scurrying frantically for whatever cover they could find. Cole and Frank were pumping lead as were the rest of us from

our posts. It seemed that we were being fired upon from every angle. It looked like root-hog or die.

I saw Clell Miller throw up his hands wildly and stumble drunkenly into the street. There he stood for an instant, tottering, with lead spraying over him. He must have been hit a dozen times before he fell.

Bullets splattered around my rain barrel. It was full of water and was leaking in many places through bullet holes. But by some miracle I wasn't hit. My twin .44's were smoking and belching hate. I saw a face in a window across the street. Bill Chadwell saw it at the same time and beat me to the shot. That face did not reappear.

The battle raged furiously for about five minutes. It seemed longer. Jesse and his two companions continued to hold their position in front of the bank. Chadwell ran up to me, his gun smoking.

"We ought to beat it, Bill!" he yelled. "They got Miller and Charley Pitts! Bob Younger's arm is shattered! I better yell for Jess!"

"You better not!" I warned him, snapping a shot toward the hardware store diagonally across the street where a man—A. R. Manning—appeared suddenly with a rifle. The slug knocked his hat off. He retreated. "Jess's dander is up for some reason! Better keep quiet and wait for orders. He might cut down on you! The feller is gun-crazy right now!"

N. H. Rose

JESSE JAMES AT 17
Even at that tender age he was a killer. Note two guns in belt.

I started to pull Chadwell down beside me when suddenly I heard the ugly smack of lead striking flesh and bone. An agonized groan shot from Bill's ashen lips. His eyes blinked wildly. He clutched at me, knees buckling.

Manning had picked him off from the shattered window of his hardware store. A dark stain spread over his shirt-front.

"They got me, Bill!" he groaned. "Right through the ticker! I'm through!"

I was too dismayed to reply. But finally I found my voice.

"You're not hurt bad, pard," I told him. "We'll be goin' out in a jiffy!"

"I'm through," he gasped, slumping down to the hard dirt sidewalk. Another slug creased him across the head, ripping up hair and scalp. I thought his face had

been blown away. Blood gushed all over it.

A great sob racked his body. I tried to lift him into a squatting posture to keep his legs behind the barrel. But his weight was too much for me. For an instant he writhed in agony, then slowly stretched out.

Bill Chadwell had cashed in his chips. Then Jesse's voice boomed through the tumult.

"Run for your nags!" he bellowed at us. "Follow me!"

We had to leave Chadwell where he fell. Miller's body lay in the street. Our horses leaped over it as we charged up the street, shooting at concealed men, shattering windows and in general peppering the town.

It was a hot fight. Jesse James was gun-mad. He wouldn't quit. His face was like a thundercloud. He was crazy with disappointment and rage.

Expecting to obtain a loot of not less than $20,000 from the bank, he had gotten a mere $200. He was furious. History says we obtained the larger amount. That is untrue, for Jess never held out on us. In that respect he was strictly on the level. There is no honor among thieves, but we were not ordinary thieves in those days.

As we rode up and down the street, firing wildly, Jim Younger was shot through the mouth. He was knocked from his plunging horse. Then followed one of the most courageous deeds I've ever seen a man perform.

Cole Younger saw him fall. He wheeled his horse and dismounted in a hail of lead and buckshot. With quick strides, he went to Jim's side, calmly picked him up and seated him in the saddle of his own horse.

It is a miracle that both were not killed by the concentration of bullets and slugs upon them. On foot, Cole was a perfect target. But he escaped. He vaulted up behind his brother, holding him erect with one arm and shooting fiercely with his other hand.

"Let's go, Jesse!" he yelled.

Jesse waved at him and we started galloping full-tilt out of town. Just then something smacked me squarely in the back, half-dazing me.

I knew instantly I had received a charge of buckshot. The pain was terrific. Everything seemed to whirl in front of me. I don't know who shot me. But I believe it was Wheeler or Hyde. They both had shotguns.

With bullets whining about us we galloped out of town, leaving our dead behind us. We lost three men that day, Clell Miller, Charley Pitts and Bill Chadwell.

Northfield was like a hornets' nest. Posses were quickly organized to pursue us. The bodies of our dead were taken to the morgue for identification.

Bill Chadwell's body was identified for mine. The saloon-keeper is said to have sworn that he was Bill Stiles. And so history was written around a case of mistaken identity. Later, before his remains were buried, he was again identified as William Stiles alias Bill Chadwell. Into the records it was written that Bill Stiles and Bill Chadwell were the same man. Bill Stiles became officially dead, but I shed no tears over that.

END OF THE GANG

Dripping blood we charged out of town. Not a single one of us had escaped without at least one wound. Our tough hides all carried buckshot. Bob Younger's right arm dangled loosely, shattered midway between wrist and elbow. Jim had a bullet through the mouth. Cole's head was bloody and there was a ball buried in the calf of his leg. Jesse, like myself, had been peppered with heavy shot. There was a nasty crease along Frank's right thigh.

The rifle ball had splattered against the cartridges in his belt and was deflected downward, imbedding itself just beneath the skin above the knee. Later, after we had gotten away from a posse of fifty man-hungry men, I watched him dig the slug out with a Bowie.

But we gave as good as we received in Northfield. Many citizens were wounded and if stories filtering into our ears were accurate, at least a half dozen died with their boots on. One of them, I was told, was Nick Gustafson, whose face we had seen over rifle sights in a window.

Howling hell pursued us, hot on our trail. But Cole Younger's face had lost its hardness now. It was tender with sympathy for his injured brothers. Cole thought a great deal of those two kids, and kids they were, still in their 'teens. He thought only to flee with them to a place where medical attention could be had for them.

Consequently, just outside of town, our two gangs split. I knew that wild country well and Jesse appointed me official guide. It was my plan to go into the woods of Wisconsin where I had friends among the Chippewas. There I felt we could hide until things cooled down.

But Cole refused to accompany us on this journey. We had no time to argue. Even then we could see a long plume of dust reaching into the sky back toward town. Pursuit was coming fast—fifty strong.

So Cole left our company and led his brothers into Watonwan County to the west. It sealed his doom. They were finally trapped in a thicket by a posse and captured. The remnants of the James band made good their escape.

But Alvin Stevens, alias Bill Chadwell, alias Bill Stiles and also known to me as Alvin Staples, did not get away. As I look at it now, living the clean life of a respected citizen and a churchman, his was a just ending. He might have been buried in a nameless grave but for my cousin, Emma, who gave him a decent burial. She thought a lot of him and placed flowers upon his grave. To show their hatred for the outlaw, people stamped the flowers into the dust.

Such was the reward for the lawless of those days.

THE

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COWBOY GONE WRONG

by

HAPSBURG LIEBE

It Was The Old Story—Cowboy Gone Wrong—Until Pardner Smith Did A Little Lawin' Of His Own

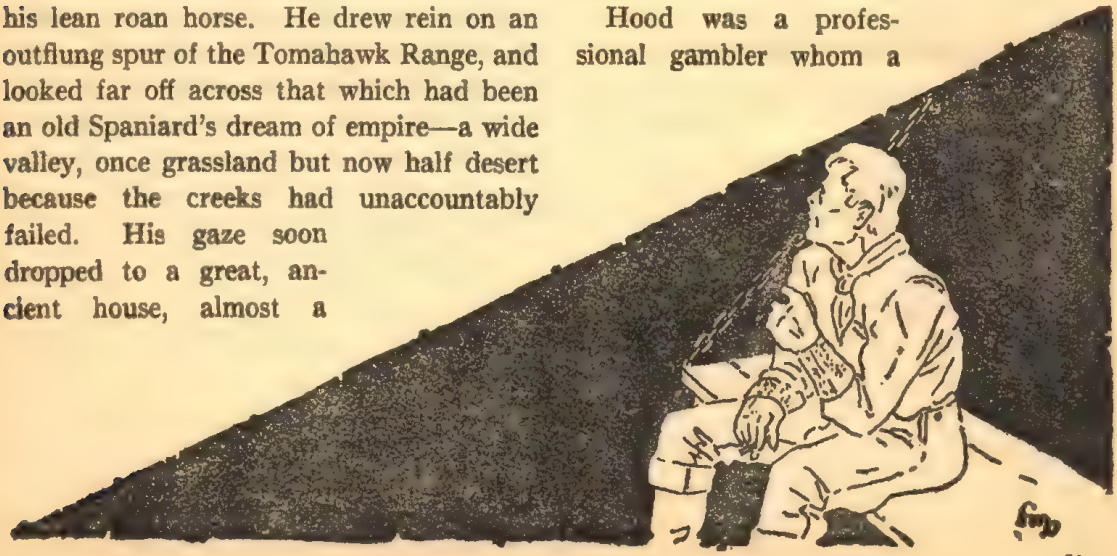
In other days he'd had many friends, this outlawed young Pardner Smith, and therein lay the reason for his nickname. His was an old story in three words: cowboy gone wrong. Too full of life to be all good, he had learned his lesson too late. The average law officer understood that, and secretly hoped he wouldn't find him when he rode hill and desert on his trail.

Pardner was dog-hungry now. So was his lean roan horse. He drew rein on an outflung spur of the Tomahawk Range, and looked far off across that which had been an old Spaniard's dream of empire—a wide valley, once grassland but now half desert because the creeks had unaccountably failed. His gaze soon dropped to a great, ancient house, almost a castle, set among starved trees near the foot of the spur. Nobody had lived there for decades.

But somebody was there now. A thin wisp of smoke rose from the rear chimney, and four horses stood under the ragged trees.

"One black, two sorrels, and a bay," breathed Smith, frowning. "Jim Hood's outfit!"

Hood was a professional gambler whom a



cold-blooded murder or so had driven to banditry. He worked now with three bad brothers, sons of another gambler, one Frisco Bill Mayfield. Frisco Bill had named his boys whimsically, Ace, King, and Jack.

They would have something to eat. There was a seep spring back of the house, and grass. Pardner Smith rode down the rocky spur. Jim Hood—big and dark, heavily mustached, in dark clothing that had been extremely good but now was torn and frayed—came out to meet him.

"Hello, Pardner!" There was welcome in Hood's voice. "I've been looking for you!"

"That so?" Smith tried to smile. "Me and my hawse—"

"Yes, I know. You and your horse are hungry," interrupted Hood. "Ride along after me, Pardner. And there's no strings attached; get me?—because I'm damned glad to see you."

Jim Hood was fairly educated, and smooth. Smith had never liked him much. But now Smith rode after him, staked the roan to grass near the seep spring, and soon afterward was following him into the house.

Jack Mayfield had thrown a meal together in the kitchen. He and his two brothers, slit-eyed and scraggly-bearded men, managed friendly greetings to the newcomer. The five of them sat down on the dusty floor and ate. Then Pardner Smith tossed a pair of one-dollar bills to the younger Mayfield, grinned, and went to his feet.

"I pays my way, hombres," he drawled. "Shore am a heap obliged, too. Guess I better be ridin'. So long!"

He waved a hand, and went toward his horse. Just as he finished coiling his picket rope, Jim Hood put a hand on his arm.

"Join up with us, Pardner. You won't get anywhere as a lone wolf."

Smith fastened the coiled rope to his saddle before he replied:

"I reckon I'll put my cards on the table, Jim. Hate to, seein' as I just had dinner with you—though I paid for it double and you said there wasn't any strings attached. I won't run with you, Jim, because you're all killers, you and them Mayfields, and I'm not. I never take anything I don't need to live on. Got to live, you know."

He was the best and quickest shot, and he had the fastest horse, in that section of Arizona. His nerve and resourcefulness were bywords. He would have been of inestimable value to Jim Hood.

"So you think you're better than we are, eh?" Hood was possessed of a high, snake-mean temper, and it was up. "And you're no killer, eh? Well, if you didn't kill Ad Mullins, who did?"

It had been this that had outlawed the already buck-wild young Pardner Smith. He went a little pale under his bronze as he swung into the saddle—with his back turned to the lean roan's head, with his right hand ready to snatch steel out of holster leather.

"Since you've brought that up, Jim," he said with a snap, "I halfway believe it was either you or one o' them Mayfields that shot Mullins. Trouble is, Ad and me was born enemies. I see you're boilin' mad, Jim. But don't you go for hardware, because I can easy beat you to it. I'd sure hate like hell to fight you, after eatin' with you, but if I have to I can!"

In a doorway directly beyond Hood the three Mayfields were standing. They had overheard. Ace Mayfield was sneaking a hand toward his thigh. Smith saw.

"Don't do it, Ace!" he called, eyes flaming.

He nudged the ribs of his horse. The animal walked off. Smith was all eyes. When a hundred feet lay between him and the back of the ancient house, one of the three in the doorway flung a shot at him. The bullet gashed his left arm. Then

Smith began to shoot. In the doorway three guns blazed. Jim Hood had dropped. When Smith had emptied his Colt, he turned in the saddle and put spurs to work, bent low and began to reload.

They made no attempt to follow the lone outlawed cowboy. He wondered whether one of his slugs had got Hood. There was, of course, a chance that Hood had merely dropped under the line of fire.

Two days passed. Pardner Smith sat half asleep in the doorway of an old Triangle Y line shack. His horse, which had been grazing nearby, lifted its head and neighed; better than a watch dog, that roan was. Smith sprang up and began to comb the surrounding terrain with keen eyes. Then, between clumps of tall scrub there came riding a single masculine figure with hands already in the air.

"Ironwood City Mex," Pardner decided.

Pepe Escobio rode on, drew rein, smiled, white teeth gleaming.

"Many days I have look for you, Señor!" he exclaimed. "I breeng wan letter from the Señor Telford."

"Old George Telford, huh?" He was the Ironwood City sheriff. "Now what in thunder—"

Escobio had given him the letter. He opened and read it with one eye still on the Mexican. *"Bien,"* he said. "Tell him I'll sure be there."

When Pepe was gone, Smith read the missive again.

> Pardner Smith,
> Dear Sir:
> I hate to see anybody like you going to hell the way you are, and since there is not much real proof against you, I think we can fix things up so the court will clear you, if you will help me a little. Anyhow, ride to town and let's talk the matter over. Slip into my office after dark. I give you my word that if my plan don't appeal to you, you can go back and finish going to hell. Yours truly,
> Geo. Telford, Shf.

"I remember that old George was a friend o' my dead and gone daddy's," Smith muttered happily. "Lucky I didn't take on with that lowdown Hood gang! Come here, hawse. We're headin' out for Ironwood City pronto. Yeah, we're all done with the crazy wild stuff. In a month we expect to be ridin' for the old Triangle Y again, and inside o' five years maybe we'll be startin' a little beef outfit o' our own. Come on here, hawse!"

Very shortly after that he was riding toward Ironwood City, fifteen miles away. He sang as he rode. Not to be hunted as he'd been hunted for a year, to go and come as other men, respected as other men; it would be a relief, most certainly. The glamour of the outlaw trail had worn out fast for Pardner Smith, tophand cowboy.

Night had been down for half an hour when he reached the county seat. He ground-anchored his roan in thick shadows cast by a clump of liveoaks back of the squat building that housed both jail and sheriff's office. Then he crept toward the dimly lighted main street, turned a corner, crossed a worn threshold and was in the presence of the tall and grizzled George Telford.

"Here I am, Sheriff," he said in a low voice, blinking in the light of an oil lamp that burned on Telford's spur-scarred desk.

The officer rose from his desk-chair, rose with his gun leveled in his right hand. "Reach, Pardner!" he ordered grimly.

Since he was not altogether a fool, Pardner reached. His eyes were popping in his amazement.

"I took you to be a man o' your word, Sheriff," he said bitterly, "instead o' the damn liar you are."

Telford's gun was against his belly now. Telford's left hand jerked Smith's old Colt from its scabbard.

"Who says I'm a liar?" he growled.

"I do, and this letter here in my shirt-pocket is proof of it!"

Wizened old Jasper Conley, deputy and jailer, appeared as though from nowhere.

He, also, had a gun leveled and ready. "Watch him close, Jasper," said Telford, as he possessed himself of the letter in question.

He read it with narrowing eyes. "Forged!" he bit out. "I didn't write this, Pardner! Looks like a raw deal for you, I'll admit, but now that I've got you I don't dare to let you go. Understand, don't you?"

"I understand, all right!" Smith lowered his hands. "Jim Hood had seen plenty o' your handwritin' on reward notices, and he was smart enough to imitate it! Mad at me because I wouldn't join up with him, and had to get even, the rattlesnake. As sure as hell's hot, I'll settle with him and his gang—if I ain't hung for killin' a hombre I didn't kill."

He was too mad to talk. Telford observed quietly:

"The big trouble is, you and Addison Mullins was long-time enemies. And you'd been seen on the same road Ad was on twenty minutes before he was found dead, and you had two empty cartridges in your gun, and you couldn't make any alibi."

"Say," cried Smith, "he'd been robbed, and I sure never would 'a' done that!"

"In my opinion, there's one point in your favor." Telford reached for his prisoner's cartridge-belt. "This way, cowboy."

He indicated a door that opened into the jail corridor. At that moment Smith became aware that men were gathering in the street doorway and at open windows. Some of them were from the range, cowpokes whom he'd ridden with, some of whom he had called his friends in other days. He waved a hand at them, then went with Telford and Conley toward a cell.

Locked in, Pardner thought again of Jim Hood and the Mayfields and swore roundly. In order to settle with that outfit, he had to get out of jail. His gaze roamed the thick walls, on which the corridor lamp threw snaky black shadows of bars. He walked over to the one small barred window. No chance of escape there.

He sat down on the narrow cell bed. Conley brought supper for him.

Some time passed. George Telford had put his deputy jailer in charge, and left the building. All was quiet except for occasional hilarious laughter that came from saloons. Smith rose, still cudgeling his brain for a way out, and began to pace the cell. After a few minutes of this, a slight sound—"Ps-s-st!"—drew his attention to the small window. Silently he hurried toward it.

A big hand thrust a holstered six-gun and a filled cartridge-belt to him between the bars! No word accompanied it. Pardner Smith did not know, could not guess, who had thus befriended him.

"Somebody," he told himself as he buckled on the gun—"somebody remembered old days on the range."

He turned to the iron door and in moderate tones called the name of the deputy jailer. Wizened old Jasper Conley materialized within a yard of him. He jabbed the barrel of the Colt between the bars and almost against Jasper Conley's teeth, and whispered rapidly:

"Unlock this door, and be quick about it. I'm not hangin' for somethin' I didn't do!"

Conley hesitated, then reached for the ring of big keys that hung from his trousers belt. He unlocked the door with a hand that was not quite steady. Pardner Smith stepped from the cell. He was grinning. At once he possessed himself of Conley's gun and belt.

"I'll need two now," he said. "Only swappin' with you though, old-timer. Tell the sheriff to give you mine. *Adios!*"

He leaped to the rear door of the corridor, threw the bolt, and in another second's time was swallowed in the darkness. Conley went out to the street and yelled for help. Men poured from the saloons, and some of them laughed when they knew.

The swift staccato of hoofs was in their ears. It soon faded out.

Although pursuit in the night was unlikely, Pardner did not slacken the pace of his fast roan until he had come to a creek miles south of Ironwood City. There he stopped, watered his horse and staked it to grass, sat himself down and put his mind to work. Hood and the Mayfields wouldn't be in La Loma Valley now. They'd have figured that he had told George Telford of their latest hideout, and would have gone to some other hideout. Or, they would have crossed the Border into Mexico.

"Mexico, that's it," Smith decided. "Anyhow, I'll go there first. One against four. *Mucho malo* business, if I slip up anywhere."

When his horse had fed for a good hour, he headed southward again. Most of the next day he spent asleep in a thicket not far from Dos Manos, which was a short distance under the Line, and after night had come he finished his journey.

Dos Manos was a small town, but it supported a large cantina. Smith left his roan in shadows back of the building, and made a round of the place, peering through windows cautiously. Neither the tables nor the bar were crowded as yet. One of the few who stood at the bar coddling tequila glasses was Pepe Escobio! Of Hood or the Mayfields he saw nothing.

He walked in, went straight to Escobio.

"Hola, amigo!" Pepe laughed. "You 'ave see the Señor Telford, yes?"

"I'll tell the world I saw him," Pardner answered. "I reckon Jim Hood paid you well. And maybe you was afraid not to do what he wanted. But I won't hold it against you, if you'll tell me this: where's Hood now?"

Here in his own country Pepe Escobio was not afraid of Jim Hood or anybody else. He must have admired Smith for having been able to escape a sheriff *Americano* so quickly. In provincial Spanish and quite soberly Pepe told the outlawed cowboy:

"Upstairs at the rear there is a room for gambling, and the Señor Hood and his friends, the Señors Mayfield, are there waiting for business that will come later in the night. But—I was not paid for delivering to you that false letter; they lied, laughed at me, kicked me! And because of this, I, Pepe Escobio, will help you, no matter what it is that you do. *'Sta bien?"*

"No. What I've got to do, I'll do myself," in low tones said Pardner Smith. It was a matter of sheer daredevil pride, one man pitting his wits against the wits of four men. He added: "Just the same, Pepe, *muchas gracias.*"

In His Own Country Pepe Escobio Was Not Afraid

He turned toward the main entrance. Pepe caught his arm. *"Espero!* I will help you anyway!" He indicated a double-action thirty-eight gun that he had half hidden inside his silken sash. *"'Sta bien,* eh? Listen, Señor Smith. There is a balcony outside that room of gambling, and with the rope that you carry on your saddle—"

"No use, *amigo,*" Pardner interrupted, and walked out.

Escobio followed him so very stealthily that he was unaware of it. Escobio saw him halt under the rear balcony and look upward.

It would be no trick at all, Smith decided, to take the picket rope from his saddle, lasso a balcony post and draw himself up. He had two guns now, was a good shot with either hand, and probably could

surprise and wipe out the four bandits in as many seconds. But he was no killer. Now that he had located his enemies, he didn't know just what to do with them! Had he found them in the open, and not on the second floor of this building—the proprietor of the cantina would surely have satellites who would fight for Hood and the Mayfields.

His muddled train of thought was interrupted with the suddenness of a thunderclap. The voice of Pepe Escobio came sharply from the upstairs room:

"Señor Smith! Pronto! I have them under the gun and am holding them for you! Here, pronto!"

"The damn fool," bit out Pardner Smith, "he meant it. They'll shoot him so full o' lead that ten men couldn't lift his body."

He was moving swiftly as he said this. Having snatched the picket rope from his saddle, he noosed one end and a moment later had tossed the noose over a balcony post. Hand over hand he went upward. The balcony door was ajar. He kicked it open, appeared on the threshold with two guns leveled. Straight across the room from him, thirty-eight ready, stood Pepe.

"Back out o' there, *amigo*," he ordered. "Save your fool hide while you can. Hustle!"

Jim Hood and Ace Mayfield sat at one table, King and Jack Mayfield sat at another close by. They had cigars in their faces. They were sneering, but they were tense, as dangerous as rattlesnakes. Only Hood's lips moved:

"And what about your own hide, Mr. Smith?"

"I'll look after that," growled Pardner. "Hustle, Pepe!"

Pepe stood as one frozen. His dark eyes were narrow, glittering. He kept the barrel of his gun moving slightly, covering the men at both tables. No ordinary greaser, this Mexican. Then he made a mistake. He turned his gaze disappointedly toward Smith, and Ace Mayfield was quick to take advantage of it. Ace fired at him from the hip—and in that same split second every gun in the room was blazing. Each of the six men ducked floorward in an attempt to escape flying slugs.

"Keep low and pour it into 'em, Pepe," yelled Pardner Smith between shots.

Again and again they fired. Powder-smoke was so thick that even the flashes of the guns, and the flames of the lamps, were obscured. It was, of course, this swirling murk that saved them from complete annihilation. From the thick and acrid blue very close to Smith there came a cry:

"Señor—!"

Pepe was trying to join him. Here and there on the floor boot-heels were rattling. A figure lurched, fell against Smith; he caught it as it sank downward. With his free hand he flung another shot, and another, into the murk. Then he swore. Fool Mexican! But he had to save Pepe, though it meant running, for Pepe had been trying to help him. With the limp form in one arm, he backed into the darkness of the balcony. Afterward he never knew how he made his way down the picket rope and to the ground with his burden.

There was a hullabaloo in the cantina now, on the stairway, on the street. Pardner hurried to his roan, quickly placed the unconscious man across his saddle, threw the rein over the horse's head and swung himself up behind the cantle. Then from a point a rod away in the darkness there came a low voice:

"Señor Smith!"

"Pepe!" gasped Pardner. "I thought I had you here on the hawse with me. Must be Jack Mayfield!"

Jack was the slenderest of the three bad brothers, the one nearest Escobio in build. Pepe called hastily: "Ride the northwest trail for the *Estados Unidos*, Señor, and I will overtake you!"

"*Bien*," Smith threw back in a hoarse whisper.

A quick second thought kept him from dumping Mayfield to the ground on his head. He had taken it for granted that the figure that had lurched against him in the gambling room was only wounded, and if this were indeed the case—well, there were possibilities. Keeping out of the street, Pardner rode for the northwest trail. The hue and cry behind him increased, then began to fade.

He was a mile or so above the Border when Pepe Escobio, riding at a swinging lope, caught up with him and reined down.

"Are you hurt, Señor?" in liquid Spanish inquired Pepe.

"Earlobe clipped. Bullet burn on one side. How about you?"

"Nothing important. It is difficult to hit those who lie on a floor, if they move each time they shoot!" Escobio stretched a hand toward the raglike figure occupying Smith's saddle. "How much is he hurt?"

"Head crease is all I could find," answered Pardner. "Lost his gun and hat. Got somethin' like forty ca'tridges and a few dollars that we might be able to use. Find out anything after I left Dos Manos?"

"*Sí.* That is why I was late in overtaking you," Pepe said. "The *rurales* stormed the cantina, but too late. Señor Hood and the two Señors Mayfield had gone, perhaps by way of the balcony and your rope!"

For a minute or so they rode the darkness in silence. Then Escobio spoke again. "I have one uncle, name of Velarde, who lives two hours' slow riding ahead of us. We go there, we eat, we sleep. Yes, Señor Smith?"

"Sounds all right to me," Smith said. "Pepe, there's dead-or-alive rewards for the Hood outfit, and if we're lucky you'll get paid yet for bringing me that fake letter. I mean, maybe we can use this rattlesnake here—Jack Mayfield—in capturin' the other three rattlesnakes; then you can turn 'em over to Sheriff George Telford, and claim the rewards."

"*Bueno!*" exclaimed Pepe. "But only the hundred pesos that they promised to me will I keep; the rest goes to you, my good friend!"

"Not on your life. Gettin' even with the sidewinders is all I want out of it," growled Pardner Smith.

Although he did not tell his swarthy companion so, reward money to him was not good money. He could get along without that.

They were welcomed at the rambling adobe house that marked the centre of Braulio Velarde's little rancho. Braulio, who was very old and wizened, had his one *vaquero* take charge of the two horses. After Pardner and Pepe had carried Jack Mayfield inside and bound his wrists and ankles securely, Pepe's uncle fed them.

Mayfield came to presently. He lay on a hard-packed earthen floor. On a small table at his feet a tallowdip burned yellowly. Turning his throbbing head to right and left, he saw that Smith and Escobio sat on blankets nearby.

"Think you've got me, huh?" The captive strained uselessly at his bonds. "Say, Jim Hood and my brothers'll kill you for this, Pardner. You too, Pepe. Wait and see."

Pepe only smiled. Mayfield then inquired: "What the hell are you aimin' to do with me, anyhow?"

Smith grinned. "Maybe we'll swap you to Sheriff Telford for reward money; Pepe's got to be paid for bringin' me that fake letter, Jack. I won't dare to go to town, but I can ride most o' the way with my *amigo* here, and let him take you on. We could start at daylight. Er—of course, if you wanted to write a note to Hood, askin' him to meet you at the La Loma house; there's a *vaquero* here who could take the note, and I reckon he could find Hood purty soon. And if you won't do it, we could fake a note, same as Jim faked one

to me. There's a chance, at least, that it'd work."

Jack Mayfield's eyes glittered in the yellow light.

"Think I'm locoed, Pardner? You'd manage to have George Telford and a posse at that old house, waitin' to round up Jim and Ace and King. I'll write no letters, Pardner!"

"Suit yourself, Jack."

Escobio took turns with Smith at staying awake to guard their captive. Late in the night the tallowdip burned out, and Pepe lighted another that Velarde had given him.

This second tallowdip lasted until the first rays of dawn streaked the sky. Smith was awake. So was Mayfield. There came a harsh voice from a point somewhere near the front of the adobe house.

"*Hola,* Velarde!"

It was the voice of Jim Hood!

Smith was on his feet now. As he stepped toward Escobio to wake him, Mayfield sneered: "So we're at Braulio Velarde's. I could 'a' told you that Jim's plan was to stop here for breakfast, if you'd asked me!"

"One more chirp out o' you," hoarsely whispered Pardner Smith, "and I'll blow a hole in you big enough for a jackrabbit to hide in."

He had slapped the muzzle of a six-gun against Mayfield's stomach. Pepe sat up rubbing his eyes. Smith told him briefly of the tight situation.

"Gag this hombre," Pardner whispered on. "His neckerchief—hustle!"

Pepe did it. Just as he finished, his uncle hastened in. Old Braulio was shaking with fright. "Señors, what shall I do?"

"Get yourself clean away from here," Smith whispered back. "Quick now, and take your *vaquero* with you. *Vamos!*"

The old Mexican vanished. Smith and Escobio, guns drawn and ready, hastened through the gloom and to front windows. In the dim light outside they saw three men dismounting a few rods away.

"Freeze and reach!" bellowed Pardner Smith—"and I mean reach high, you sidewinders!"

They must have recognized his voice. Less desperate men, knowing the lone outlawed cowboy as these men knew him, would have obeyed the order. Hood ducked to the right, Ace and King Mayfield to the left. Those at the windows fired, and were almost sure that they had missed; the three bandits were moving swiftly and the light was poor. Smith hastened to Pepe.

"I think," he breathed, "they've snuck around to come in behind us the back way. Go out and follow, stickin' close to the ground, and shoot damned straight when you shoot. Either they die or we do; get me?"

Pepe hurried outside. Pardner crept toward the rear inside. He stumbled over a small *olla.* From just ahead of him a gun blazed instantly and lead plucked at his sleeve. He sprang quickly to the right, dropped, began to thumb two hammers. The flashes of his guns showed him two crouching figures, those of Jim Hood and King Mayfield, in a corner. They fired back at him, but always he had changed his position. Soon they stopped shooting. So did he. But there was shooting close outside at the back—the heavy thunder of a forty-five and the bark of a double-action thirty-eight.

And then there was silence.

It held, seemingly age-long. Gradually the light of day became stronger. Smith's straining eyes caught movement on the floor, and he leveled a Colt.

"Never mind, Pardner." It was Jim Hood. His voice was weak. "You've won, I—guess, Pardner."

Smith kept still, held ready guns. A few more minutes, and the light was sufficient for him to see that Hood and his companion lay sprawled and bleeding, neither with a weapon anywhere near his hand.

"Pepe!" called Smith, going to his feet. "Pepe!"

There was no answer. He took possession of Jim Hood's and King Mayfield's guns and ran to the back door. That which he saw lying just outside wrung a bitter oath from his lips. No need to ask Pepe if he were much hurt. A crimson patch on the right half of the young Mexican's shirt front told the story. Pepe opened his eyes, saw Pardner Smith, nodded feebly toward the inert form of Ace Mayfield.

"Look!" he managed to say, with pride.

Smith knelt beside him.

"Yeah, I see. Got your man, all right. Dead or alive, accordin' to the law, and this snake sure is dead. You must go to a doctor, Pepe, and the nearest one is in Ironwood. Your uncle and his man have sold out complete, so I'll take you myself. And also I'll tie the Hood bunch on their hawses and take 'em to George Telford. *Bien?*"

"No!" weakly cried Pepe. He struggled in vain to sit up. "You will be caught!"

Pardner shrugged and swore. "Anyhow, you're goin' to the doc, and them sidewinders is goin' to jail. I swore I'd settle with 'em for that fake letter, didn't I?"

In the afternoon of that day, the five horses plodded wearily down the dusty main street of Ironwood City. Pardner Smith was carrying Pepe Escobio on his saddle front. The other four men, living and dead, were bound upon saddles.

A crowd gathered quickly as the cavalcade halted before the office of the high sheriff. Pardner delivered Pepe into the arms of a townsman, and wheeled his roan for a getaway.

"Not so fast, cowboy!" growled Telford's chief deputy. He sprang for the horse's rein, and got it.

In his cell, Smith stretched his dog-tired body on the narrow bed and soon went off to sleep. Night was close when he woke. The grizzled sheriff was standing over him. Telford spoke. His voice had a kindly ring.

"There's some news, Pardner."

Smith sat up on the bed and frowned down at his dusty boots. "I'm listenin'," he said gloomily.

Telford proceeded:

"Escobio won't die. Neither will Jim Hood, or King or Jack Mayfield. Howsomever, the doc and I made King think he was going to cash his chips, and he owned up that it was Jim who shot and robbed Addison Mullins—which was the only really important score the law held against you. Jack tried to turn state's evidence by swearing the same thing. But I believe your bringing the bad hombres in would have been enough to make the court give you the benefit of the doubt and free you anyway."

"Judge Colt Has Already Tried You!"

"That so?" Pardner was interested now.

"Yes." Telford nodded. "You've already been tried, you might say, with old Judge Colt on the bench. You sure was determined to get even with the Hood outfit, wasn't you?"

Pardner admitted that. The officer went on: "I could see that you was, the other time I had you here in jail." He half winked. "And it's a little more than possible that this is why a gun and belt was slipped to you through the window there!"

"So it was *you* done that!" gasped Pardner Smith. "One sheriff who uses his head sometimes. You knowed I'd never shoot old Jasper Conley. Well, I'll be—"

He broke off laughing.

The Cactus City Department

VOL. 15 No. 44

SERIOUS EPIDEMIC RAGING

Citizens In Danger

German measles is a not very serious disease which is caught by grown-ups as easy as by children. That is, they ain't very serious unless complications set in, which complications might be the case in the epidemic of measles which we are now enjoying. Notice that I said "might," because I ain't accusing and I ain't denying. Just look at the facts and make your own answer. (Only maybe you better not make it out loud.)

It was T-bone Tillie who first broke out with them, a few days after a certain traveling salesman was in town. Then right away Solo Seton got the same. Mrs. Seton came down with them next. And the next victim was Utah Timmons.

To me it wasn't very surprising that after Utah the next outbreak was up on the Reservation (you know how Utah is). A not bad looking young squaw got the red marks, which same were pretty quick passed on to Big-mouth Black, superintendent of the Reservation, whose duty it is to keep in close touch with everything on the Reservation.

The epidemic came back to town after that, as Mrs. Kokomo Kingsley was next in order. Then who should get them but Deacon Diggs. And immediately after him a whole flock of people got them (the Deacon sure gets around) including the Widow Widdemer, Mrs. McGonigle and Old Maid O'Malley.

The latest victim is Pop McCoy, who I always thought was too dang old for that sort of thing. (The measles, I mean.) Personally I am staying home nights until this here epidemic is over. It ain't the measles I'm afraid of; it's the complications.

NO MORE SUNDAY POLO

Algy Twombley-Twombley says there will be no more amateur polo games out at his place on Sundays. Not with his very expensive and imported polo ponies anyways. Algy says he didn't mind when the local cowpokes roped and busted the horses to prevent a goal from being made—but it was just too dang much when the boys started shooting the horses out from under each other. After all, says Algy, it's just a game.

OLIVER JURY HAS NO VERDICT

At a late hour this afternoon, the jury hadn't yet reached a decision on the Oliver case. Maybe it will be tomorrow before Oliver finds out whether he is guilty or not because the jury is busy with a poker game and hasn't got time to figure out an answer.

NOTICE: I will not be responsible for any bills contracted by my wife, dang her. Anyways, not until she says she is sorry for hitting me over the head with a ax and also throwing stove lids (4), rolling pins (1), and flat-irons (2) at me just because I wouldn't buy her a new washtub for her birthday.

I guess this will teach her not to be getting no uppity and extravagant ideas into her thick head. The coal-oil cans she's been using the twenty years since we been married is plenty good enough to do washing in.
(signed) Tightwad Wallace.

OBITUARY

Jeff Dickson: Died of overconfidence, on account the sheriff beat him to it.

BIG GOLD RUSH

Lost Padre Mine Found

The big gold rush out by Painted Rock is now over, and everybody can relax and dream about what they'd have done with all the gold if they had found any. For the benefit of those few citizens who didn't get roped in on the Painted Rock stampede, I will explain just how it all happened and why.

The whole business was started up by somebody accidentally and carelessly dropping a letter out of their pocket. Which letter read like this:

Dear Joe:

Because you are the only hombre I can trust, I will let you in on a big secret. I know where the Lost Padre Mine is. The reason I know is because a dying Indian Chief told me. But the reason I can't go dig it up myself is because I am very busy serving ninety days in jail. And if the mine ain't dug up right now, why nobody can find it until next year, as you can see by the directions, which same is very simple so even you ought to be able to find the right place.

The dying Indian Chief told me like this: Wait until the third full moon after the sun starts south (which time will be along about now). The night the moon is full, be at the lone Joshua tree at the south end of Painted Rock, just as the moon comes up over the Hellfire Hills. Then walk from the Joshua right directly towards the moon for 800 steps. Then turn due north for 800 steps. Dig there.

Well, Joe, there is the dope right direct from a dying Indian Chief. You go dig it up and I guess pretty quick we will both be rich, as I will split 50-50 with you. Be sure and don't tell nobody.

(*Page 2 column 3*)

EDITORIAL

The Ladies' Sociable Society just sent an Official Committee to ask me to print a editorial about the menfolks of Cactus City setting a good example for the Growing Boy. I told them I would, just to get shet of them, but after thinking the matter over, I don't see what the hell they have got to kick about.

I think the men of this town are a dam good example for anybody's Growing Boy. For instance, there isn't a hombre in the county who chews snuss. They all use good, plain tobacco. And every one of them drinks his whisky straight. (Algy Twombley-Twombley puts fizz-water in his, but he is a Englishman and don't count.)

Furthermore and besides, some of the best off-hand cussing I ever heard was done by Cactus City gents. Also they are honest; hell, it's a well known fact that anybody caught cheating in a poker game is right promptly got rid of with a .45 slug. The same is applied to horse thieves, excepting that horse thieves is sometimes hung.

And who ever heard of a Cactus City man who didn't give another gent an even break in a gunfight? Nor will a local citizen who has any pride at all jump on a single Texan. Either he'll tie one hand behind his back or else he'll wait until the Texan has got three-four more Tejanos to back him up.

So hell, ladies, I honest can't figure to lecture the menfolks of this town. I think they are upright and able men in every sense of the word. Of course, if it is in some of their household duties that they ain't up to scratch, why, it is up to yourselfs personally to let them know about that.

CORRECTION

In the last number of the Gazette, I referred to Mrs. Bailey's baby as "the prettiest baby in town." Well, that was a miscue and a misprint. I meant to say "ONE of the prettiest babies in town."

Now, will the rest of you females who has babies please stay away from the Gazette?

PERSONALS

Owl-eye Owen was minus his glass eye again for a few days, but he has got same back again now. He found little Bobby McGonigle using it for a taw in a marble game.

(I might as well add that Owl-eye won't be needing his china eye anyway, as he won't be doing any reading. I am hereby cancelling his subscription to the Gazette until he pays up for the last six months.)

—

Pious Piper has done quit smoking cigars for a period of thirty days from date. Not because of his health, he says, but just as a means of punishment. Pious says he caught hisself cheating at solitaire and he wants to teach hisself a lesson.

—

Leo Schilling, leader of the Cactus City Band, wants to apologize for the poor concert which the band performed last Wednesday. Although I didn't notice it personally, Leo says that the concert was plumb spoiled account of all the extra noises made by Tooter Tucker, who plays the slide trombone. The reason, Leo explains, is that Tooter was suffering from indigestion and had gas on his stomach.

(In case some of you smart hombres is snickering, I'll tell you straight out that the extra noises wasn't what you think they was. It was merely extra toots on the trombone, which same occurred every time that Tooter belched. So there.)

PUBLIC NOTICES

FOUND: I picked up a solid silver concha which looks like it was lost off'n the browband of a bridle. And without no reward, I will be only too glad to return said concha to its owner, if the swivel-stemmed-son-of-a-sheep-herder's-squaw can prove that he lost same in my corral the night my palomino horse was stole.

(Signed) Rawhide Rawlins.

LOST PADRE MINE

I'll be waiting anxious to hear from you.

Your old pard,

RUSTY.

PS. Maybe after you have dug up all the gold which the Padres cached you can come down to Brimstone and bail me out.

Well, folks, that is the letter which explains where the Lost Padre Mine is at. But it doesn't explain how come most of the population of Cactus City was out to Painted Rock last Friday night (when the moon was full).

People started drifting out to the Rock about sundown, all of them trying to appear casual as if they had some business to be skulking around the Rock.

Still nobody was smart 'nuff to figure things out. Finally however, Blabber Blaisdell got to running off at the mouth and spilled the reason he was at the Rock. Instanter everybody within earshot got suspicious at the same time and got to inquiring of each other's business.

When things was finally checked up on by the whole crowd, it was discovered that each and every one of them had found a copy of the letter with directions from the dying Indian Chief, which had been dropped accidentally and carelessly out of somebody's pocket. There must of been a hundred copies of that letter.

Well, that is the lowdown on the big gold rush. It sure showed a lot of smart hombres around this town that they ain't half so dam smart as they think they are. Hell, when I found a copy of that letter I knew right off that it was a hoax and a joke. I went out to the Rock that night just because it is my duty as a editor to get all the news, besides wanting to see a lot of smart hombres made dam fools out of.

So I want to explain here and now that the reason I was packing a pick and shovel on my shoulder was just because I didn't want to give away the joke.

Cards and

When A Railroad Empire Builds Into A Cattle Empire, Hates Blossom. Starr Gordon Crossed His Guns And Cards To Find That Cattle Was Still King

As he turned the bay gelding down from the railroad grade, Joe Ewalt's eyes widened with surprise. Sam Kincade was backing out of the door of the First Chance. There were two shallow steps between the door of the little shack saloon and the ground, for the First Chance stood on skids so that it might follow the steady march of the steel westward. Sam Kincade backing out the door of his own place! Joe wondered what was up.

Kincade cleared the two shallow steps and continued his backward progress, then another man appeared in the door. Joe knew this man also. He was Brice Crane, Starr Gordon's handy man in Aspodel,

Cattle

In a last desperate play he tried to stuff the Faro box.

by

BENNETT FOSTER

Crane was bad, a killer in his own right, overshadowed only by the flaunting wickedness of Gordon. Joe pulled his bay to a stop and slid down, leaving the reins trailing. As he moved from the side of the horse, Joe lifted the long barreled .44 Russian, making sure that the gun was free in the holster before he spoke.

"You fellows playin' hide an' go find?" drawled Joe Ewalt, the faint slurring of the South in his voice, "or is this a party mebbe?"

Both men jerked to sudden stops. Kincade turned his head slowly, as though fearful of taking his eyes from Crane. His face brightened visibly when he saw Joe.

"Oh," said Sam Kincade, "it's you, is it?"

"As far as I know," agreed Joe dryly. "What's the idea? You fellows act like you was two strange dogs or you smelt a skunk or somethin'."

"I'm glad you came along, Ewalt." Crane spoke heavily. He was a big man, Brice Crane. Even in the hot September weather he wore a long-tailed black coat. His boots were resplendent, covered with dust now but their Morocco luster showing through. His hat was low crowned, wide brimmed, of the best felt. It was a sort of gambler's uniform, thought Joe Ewalt, looking at the big man.

Kincade echoed Crane's words. "I'm glad you showed up, Joe," he said.

Joe Ewalt grinned thinly. His face, square jawed, the color of a well worn saddle, crinkled in little lines and became suddenly youthful. "Reg'lar committee of welcome," he drawled. "I never knowed I was so popular."

"That son . . ." Sam Kincade jerked his head toward Crane, "an' me are goin' to settle this now. We been waitin' for somebody to show up."

"What's the occasion?" demanded Joe Ewalt, the smile fading from his face. "What you two got between you?"

Kincade's eyes flashed to Crane and back to Joe Ewalt. "We got plenty to settle," he said heavily. "Damn his heart, I'm goin' to kill him!"

"As bad as that, huh?" Joe tried to make light of the matter. "What's he done to you, Sam? Stepped on yore pet corn or somethin'?"

"I've called his hand, the dirty—" Crane applied a certain word to Sam Kincade. "That's what I done! Kill me, will he? Hell! I'll bury you, Kincade!"

"Now listen," Joe Ewalt spoke, reasoning with the two. "You boys both been drinkin'. You better let this go awhile. You get a night's sleep an' you'll feel better. You—"

"He'll sleep in hell tonight!" blurted Kincade. "No damn' son is goin' to come out an' try to collect offen me. Not an' get away with it. This has gone too far for you to stop, Ewalt."

Joe Ewalt shrugged. There was no reasoning with these men. He had known it from the first. This thing was deadly.

"I'll just rack along then," he said, moving toward the bay. "I did want a drink but if you two are hell bent to have it out—"

"Wait!" It was Kincade who made the demand. "You stay here, Joe. We been waitin' for somebody to come."

"Well—" Joe stopped his movement. He was watching the two, watching closely. Both Kincade and Crane had been drinking; both were just a little drunk. That made them all the more dangerous. Kincade had killed two men, Joe knew. How many Brice Crane had accounted for he couldn't say. There was a lot of talk about Brice Crane in Aspodel.

"I want you to see fair play," Kincade continued, his voice a little thick with drink and anger. "Him an' me are goin' to settle this."

"Aw, hell, Sam," began Joe, "you don't want to—"

"No! Wait!" Sam Kincade interrupted Joe. "He's been bustin' around here tellin' how big he is an' all. Come out here today, tryin' to collect off me. Tellin' me that Gordon sent him out. I told him that him an' Starr Gordon could both go to hell!"

"An' I'll send you there, you little—" Crane growled his interjection. "Him an' me's goin' to shoot it out, Ewalt."

"There ain't no other way to settle this?" Joe Ewalt had not given up his rôle of peacemaker.

"No!" both men spoke at once.

Kincade continued. "We're goin' to walk out there an' stand back to back," he said,

gesturing toward the dry sand of the arroyo in front of the First Chance. "We'll pull our guns. You say, 'ready!' an' count ten. We'll walk away from each other. At ten we'll turn an' shoot."

"Well," said Joe, "if you can't settle this no other way—"

"The one that comes out owns the place an' has to bury the other one." Kincade disregarded Joe's interruption. "You'll see fair play, Joe?"

Joe Ewalt nodded glumly. He had witnessed such duels before now, had acted as second on one occasion. He knew what was expected.

"I'll see fair play," he agreed. "You want me to say 'ready' an' count to ten. At ten you turn an' shoot an' keep shootin'. Is that it?"

Crane strode after Kincade. Joe Ewalt shrugged. He had done all that he honorably could. After all this was not his affair. He would see fair play and that was all. These men were determined. They would finish their quarrel and the winner would take all, nor would there be any aftermath. Law had not yet penetrated to the end of steel.

Kincade stopped in the middle of the arroyo. He half turned so that his left side was toward Joe Ewalt. He pulled his gun from its holster and rolled the cylinder. Joe could hear the faint clicks. Crane, too, halted, facing so that his back was against Kincade's, towering over the smaller man. Their shoulders touched. Crane's gun was in his hand. He, too, spun the cylinder.

"Yo're hell bent on doin' this?" Joe made one last attempt.

"Go on!" snarled Crane.

"Count!" ordered Kincade.

Joe took a breath. "Ready?" he asked.

Both men answered, "Yeah!"

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . ."

Joe began his even count. His eyes flashed alternately from one man to the other, watching them as they plodded steadily apart, sand spurting out from beneath their boots.

"Five . . . six . . . seven . . ."

Crane whirled! His gun came up, roared, and Sam Kincade stumbled forward. Crane was pivoting, his gun falling level on Joe Ewalt's chest. Joe jumped backward like a frightened cat. His own right hand dipped and the big .44 Russian flashed out from his holster. Joe's right hand made a smooth quarter circle. It was perfection! Brice Crane, struck above the belt by the first big slug, reeled back. The second slug, arriving on the heels of the first, smashed heart and chest. Brice Crane threw his arms wide, sending his gun flying, and completing his movement backward, fell spread-eagled on the sand. Joe Ewalt, gun in hand, ran forward, not toward Brice Crane but to Sam Kincade.

The little saloon man was down in the sand, face buried. Joe slid an arm under the limp body and turned Kincade on his back. It was too late to do anything for Sam Kincade. Crane's slug had finished the quarrel. Joe got up. He put his gun in its holster and walked slowly back to where Crane lay. For a moment he stood, looking down at the treacherous gambler. Then, settling his hat on his thatch of brown hair he turned short and walked to where the bay stood, head upflung, ears pricked forward.

Joe had trouble catching the bay. The horse was alarmed, dancing. The shots had made him nervous. Finally, catching the trailing reins, Joe swung himself up. He looked back toward the arroyo indecisively, then shook his head and turned the bay. Those bodies back there would tell their own story, be mute evidence of Joe's tale. He would leave them. Kincade had friends, as did Crane. Those friends would find the two and look after them properly. In the meantime he, Joe Ewalt, would go on to camp. He had a long ride yet to make. He had done the job set him. He

had seen fair play. Joe nudged the bay gently with his spurs.

It was dark when Joe Ewalt rode into camp. Full dark and a good two hours after sunset. Light flickered through the door of the little shack that Joe and his partner, Dakota Smith, had thrown up. There was no lamp to give a clear, steady glow. Kerosene was for towns, not for camps.

Joe called, "Hello, Dakota," and heard the old man answer from inside the shack. Dakota's figure darkened the doorway. Joe slid down.

"How was it, Joe?" demanded Dakota, limping forward. The old man had been crippled long ago in the Black Hills. He dragged a leg a little when he walked.

Joe, stripping gear from his horse, made answer. "All right," he said. "Lodge give us the contract."

Dakota grunted. Joe turned his horse in the little pole corral. He heard the sucking sound that the horse made as he drank, and then a threshing as the gelding rolled. Joe carried his saddle and gear toward the shack, Dakota shambling along beside him.

"We're to furnish fifteen head a week," said Joe, dumping the saddle inside the door. "Good, prime stuff. Later on Lodge says we can bring in elk an' deer, but right now he wants beef."

"Who got the other contracts?" demanded Dakota, crossing to the fire. "Come on an' eat, Joe."

Joe, outside the door, poured water into the washbasin. "I don't know who got the others," he said. "I figgered fifteen head was about all we could handle for now. We'll make money at that if Old Leonard stays with what he said."

"Leonard don't like the railroad," rejoined Dakota, putting food from the Dutch oven on a plate.

"He'll stick with us, though." Joe spoke confidently. "I worked for him for a year an' his word's good. I'll go see him tomorrow."

Dakota grunted and put the plate on a slab table. "We won't make no money until we start haulin' elk an' deer," he complained. "Come on before yore grub gets cold."

Joe sat down at the table. "I don't know about that," he answered. "Seven dollars a head is pretty good for just butcherin'. I got Harve Mulligan to haul the beef in."

"For how much?" Dakota limped across from the fire with the coffee pot.

"Twenty dollars a trip." Joe had his mouth full of venison. "That leaves us a clear profit of eighty-five dollars a week. That ain't bad, Dakota."

"Mebbe not." Dakota put down the coffee pot and lowered himself to the floor, his back against the log wall. "What happened in town?"

"Nothin' in town," replied Joe. "I come out by the First Chance."

"See Kincade?"

"I saw him. Brice Crane killed Sam Kincade, Dakota. Shot him in the back."

"The hell!" Dakota's voice was dispassionate.

"An' I killed Brice Crane!" Joe Ewalt pushed his plate back.

"Make out yore supper!" Dakota Smith's voice rasped in the semi-darkness. "Killin' Brice Crane ain't nothin' to upset a man's stumick."

"Mebbe not, but it's upset mine."

"How'd it happen?" Dakota lit a match and applied it to his pipe. Joe could see the older man's brown, bearded face in the light. He could even catch a little reflection where the light struck against the dark, greasy buckskin that Dakota wore.

"They was goin' to shoot it out," said Joe Ewalt. "I was to see fair play. Crane turned before the count an' cut down on Sam. Then he tried for me an' I let him have it."

Dakota grunted. The fire in his pipe

glowed and dimmed, glowed and dimmed again.

"Ever been in trouble before?" he asked suddenly.

Joe Ewalt's voice was low. "I come up through Texas from Tennessee," he said slowly. "I been in trouble once or twice. I—" He got up from the slab bench, strode uneasily to the cabin door.

"You satisfied you done right?" Dakota's voice was very soft, very gentle.

"There wasn't nothin' else I could do," Joe turned abruptly. "Crane shot before the count was over."

Dakota got up from the wall and limped toward his bedding. "Set down an' eat yore supper," he commanded over his shoulder. "Now where in the hell . . ."

The fire blazed suddenly. Dakota had thrown on a piece of fat pine. The oily flames shot up from the wood. Dakota crossed to his younger partner.

"Y'ere," he said, holding out a bottle. "Take a drink. It'll settle yore stumick."

Joe Ewalt took the bottle, lifted it and drank. He held it out to Dakota.

"Yo're young," said Dakota, taking the bottle. "Time yo're as old as me you won't let little things upset yuh. How far they got with the grade now?"

"Out past the Pine Hills," Joe answered automatically. "The steel is out to Bent Draw. That's where it happened. Kincade had his place right in the draw."

"Damn it!" Dakota's voice was petulant. "Forgit that! Eat yore supper. Git drunk. Do somethin'."

"Hell, I—"

Both men stopped. There was a horse coming down the hill toward the creek. More than one horse, two or three by the sounds. Dakota put the bottle on his bed and shifted backward, into the darkness beside the fireplace.

"Hold yore head up, now," warned Dakota huskily. Two or three more pieces of fat pine fell on the fire. It blazed up, lighting the little room. The horses stopped outside the cabin. There was the sound of voices and then came a call.

CALL IN THE NIGHT

"Oh, Ewalt!"

Joe Ewalt was at the table. He looked toward the door and answered. "Yeah! Come in!"

"Come on out!"

"Don't yuh!" warned Dakota fiercely.

"I'm eatin'," Joe answered the call. "Come on in."

Again the sound of voices in consultation. Then a man loomed suddenly in the cabin door. Joe recognized the face in the light from the fire. It was Starr Gordon.

Gordon was big. He filled the little doorway. There were men behind him, but Gordon took his time. He looked around the little room before he stepped in. "Where's your pardner?" he demanded, as he cleared the door.

"Around some place," answered Joe. "Have some supper?"

Two other men were at the door now, one just inside, the other blocking the entrance. Gordon shook his head. Taller than either Joe Ewalt or Dakota Smith, his hat barely cleared the roof of the shack. The hat was big and white. Below it Gordon's long hair streamed to his shoulders. His eyes were blue, close set above his big, curved nose, and there was a sweeping mustache above his thin, cruel lips.

"Have you seen Brice Crane?" he demanded. "I sent him out to Kincade's place an'—"

"I saw him," said Joe Ewalt quietly.

"Where?"

"He was lyin' on his back in Bent Draw." Joe's voice was calm.

"On his back? What in the hell—"

"I come along just as him an' Kincade decided they couldn't stand no more of each other." Joe shifted his position on

the bench. He was watching Starr Gordon carefully. "They was goin' to shoot it out. Back to back an' walk ten steps. I was to see fair play. Crane turned an' shot Kincade before the count was over, an' I killed Crane." Here was a statement of bare facts. No embroidery, no explanation, just the statement.

Starr Gordon's voice was silky. "An' you killed Brice Crane? Crane was a friend of mine, you know?"

"Sure I knew."

From the darkness beside the fireplace Dakota spoke. "You there by the door. Stan' still!"

The muzzle of a big gun showed in the firelight. Just the muzzle and nothing else. Dakota Smith was behind that gun, a 45-110-500 Sharps. The man by the door froze.

Dakota spoke again. "I'm copperin' all bets, Gordon," he said softly.

Starr Gordon paid no attention to Dakota Smith. He was staring at Joe Ewalt. "And you killed Brice Crane?" he repeated. "You also bid in a beef contract today, I hear. You seem to be getting along in the world, Ewalt." There was deadly menace in that silky voice. Joe Ewalt recognized it. He stood up.

"I killed Brice Crane," he said, without a tremor. "I bid in the beef contract, too. I heard you wanted that. An' what are you goin' to do about it, Gordon?"

The man in the door blazed into words. "He never killed Crane fair, Starr. He must of dry-gulched him. The little—"

Starr Gordon threw three words over his shoulder: "Shut up, Tex!" His eyes never left Joe Ewalt's face.

"What am I going to do about it?" he said smoothly. "I think you'll find out, Ewalt, if you live long enough."

He backed toward the door. Tex and the other man with him slid out the opening. Starr Gordon paused in the opening a moment, paused without speaking, then he, too, disappeared into the darkness outside. Dakota Smith, moving swiftly, had the muzzle of the Sharps against the door and the door slammed shut almost before Gordon's foot cleared the lintel. Dakota whirled fiercely.

"You dam' fool," he swore at Joe Ewalt. "Stand there like a ninny an' them outside in the dark! You ain't got the sense you was born with."

Joe Ewalt relaxed. Outside there came the creak of saddles and then the sound of horses moving.

Joe Ewalt sat down on the bench. "No," he said, "I ain't got the sense I was born with, Dakota. I reckon, though, that I'll eat some supper now."

Dakota had spent years among the Sioux. Brought up on the plains, a buffalo hunter, scout, guide and trapper, he slept like a cat, with one eye open. Neither Dakota nor Joe Ewalt worried when, Joe having finished his meal and cleaned up the dishes, they allowed the fire to die down, covered it with ashes, and turned in. Dakota, lying on his bed, staring up into the darkness, was well content over one thing. He had been worried concerning Joe Ewalt, had Dakota. Now he worried no longer. To Dakota, Joe had been just a cow-puncher, a good boy, trying to get along and make some money out of a beef contract with the railroad commissary. Now, grinning a little, Dakota had Joe's measure. Joe was a fighting man, one of the old, hard breed from which Dakota himself had sprung. Joe had come through. In a pinch he kept his nerve and his appetite, two prime factors in Dakota Smith's estimation.

The two were awake and stirring before sunup. While Dakota pottered about the fireplace, putting breakfast together, Joe was outside doing what few chores there were. The two had put up the little shack, thrown together a pole corral beside the creek, and built a little shed to serve as their slaughter house. The buildings and

corral were on land claimed by old John Leonard. John Leonard claimed half the country. He had run cattle for more than twenty years. In reality Joe and Dakota were on public domain but then there was very little owned land in the district. It was to John Leonard that they looked for their beef supply.

Leonard didn't like the railroad. It was bisecting his range, splitting it in two. He didn't like the encroachment of civilization. Leonard, like a number of old time cattlemen, was something of a czar. He had perhaps fifty men, riders and range foremen, working for him. Until a month ago Joe Ewalt had been one of these.

Now Joe, teaming with Dakota Smith, was branching out for himself. If Joe Ewalt and his partner made good on their meat contract with the construction con-

"This Gun Shoots A Long Ways"

tractors, then in a year or two, Joe would be running a little cow outfit of his own. Joe would be just one among many. Leonard could see the handwriting, could realize what was coming, but that didn't make him like it any better.

When breakfast was finished Joe declared his intention of riding over to see Leonard. The ranch, Leonard's Rocking L, was fifteen miles distant from the camp. Dakota announced that he was going along, and so, after running in their horses, the two saddled and prepared to leave.

They made no attempt to lock up the camp. In the first place there were no locks, and in the second, such procedure would have puzzled them. Instead they put their supplies on a swinging shelf to preserve them from the pack rats and other such invaders, closed the cabin door, turned loose the five horses that they were not using, and climbed their saddles.

The two made a picture as they left the camp. Joe, young, supple, of medium height, broad shoulders tapering to narrow hips, booted, blue shirted, gray-eyed and virile, giving to the motion of his horse as that animal in sheer exuberance pitched down the hill. Dakota, small, squat, covered with greasy, smoke-blackened, blood-stained buckskin, bearded to the eyes, broad hat pulled down tight, black eyes wary and ceaselessly searching, moccasined feet in his wide wooden stirrups, heavy Sharps rifle across his saddle bows, pulling down his horse sharply. They rode up the creek, climbed the ridge above the cabin, and were on their way.

Leonard was not at home. The cook said that he had gone to Aspodel and accordingly the partners turned their horses and went on southeast toward Aspodel.

There was nothing permanent about Aspodel. The town was of the type that follows construction. There were shacks, tent houses, a few buildings that might remain. Aspodel drew its breath and was nurtured by the construction crews that constantly pushed the grade and the new steel westward. There was business in Aspodel, a great deal of business. Trains ran into the town bringing steel, ties, lumber, supplies of all kinds. Sometime within a month Aspodel would move on west, the gamblers, the bawdy houses, the storekeepers, the restaurant owners, all the people that fed and were fed by the construction men. A few would remain, the nucleus of the little supply town that would eventually ship beef and mutton and wool and hides to the east.

Now the town slept fitfully by day, a nightmarish, tumbling, tossing sleep; and at night like some jungle animal, wakened, stretched, and roared. Joe Ewalt and Dakota Smith rode their horses into Aspodel's main street, went down the street toward the depot, the most nearly permanent

building in town, and stopping before a board shack that housed a saloon, tied their horses to the hitch rail and went inside.

The bartender had seen John Leonard, in fact had served him a drink not more than fifteen minutes before the partners' arrival. Leonard would be at Meyers' store, in the bar man's opinion. Joe thanked him and started toward the door when the bartender called him back.

"Have a drink," urged the barkeeper hospitably. "Say, wasn't you out at Kincade's place yesterday?"

Joe nodded. "I was there," he said briefly. "We'll come back for that drink later. We're in a hurry right now."

"I knowed Kincade," said the bartender, disregarding Joe's statement concerning haste. "Some of the boys have gone out there this mornin'. We heard what happened."

"What did you hear?" Dakota pricked up his ears. There was something not particularly pleasant in the barkeeper's tone.

"Heard that Sam an' Brice Crane had some trouble an' that Ewalt here butted in on it."

"An' what did you hear?" Joe, at the door, turned about and eyed the man behind the bar.

"There's sev'ral stories," the barman snapped a towel at a fly. "Some of 'em ain't too nice, Ewalt."

Joe Ewalt's face was stern. "I bought chips when I had to," he said. "I was to see fair play an' I done it. If anybody asks you, Ben, I killed Brice Crane after he'd shot Sam in the back. Come on, Dakota."

Dakota lingered a moment after Joe had cleared the door. "An' if anybody asks yuh," said Dakota, low voiced and leaning across the bar, "Joe will buy chips ag'in if he's crowded. I might get in the game myse'f." The old man suggestively slapped the stock of the big Sharps, his constant companion, and nodded sagely to Ben, the barkeeper.

Ben squinted his eyes. "I never liked Brice Crane," he announced. "He was too big for his pants, but it don't pay to buck Starr Gordon in this town."

"This gun shoots mighty good an' a long ways." Dakota's statement was abstract "So long, Ben. We'll come back for that drink." He followed Joe out.

Leonard was in Meyers' store, one of the town's few permanent buildings. Meyers' store had been on its site before Aspodel moved in; it would be there when Aspodel was gone.

The lathlike ranchman nodded to Joe and Dakota when they came up. Joe went to business at once.

"I got a contract to supply fifteen beeves a week to the commissary," he said. "You remember I talked it over with you, Mister Leonard?"

Leonard nodded. "I said I'd supply 'em," he said gruffly. "Quoted you twenty dollars a head, didn't I?"

"That's what you said," agreed Joe.

"You can have 'em," Leonard held to his word. "I'll have good prime stuff for you to handle, deliverin' at the ranch."

This, too, was in accord with the previous agreement. "We'll be over this evenin'," said Joe. "We got to deliver Wednesday an' it'll crowd us a little to get ready."

"Come early tomorrow," Leonard set the time. "I won't be home 'til late. You can pay me when you get the beef."

Joe glanced at Dakota. They had not planned to pay on delivery, indeed could not pay. All the little capital they had was tied up in horses, supplies, and equipment. "I thought we was to settle at the end of the month when we got our pay on the contract," Joe expostulated.

"Pay on delivery," said Leonard shortly. "I can't take chances on gettin' my money."

There was no use arguing. The old

rancher had made up his mind. Joe knew Leonard. Somebody had been talking to the Rocking L owner.

Joe Ewalt nodded. "All right, Mister Leonard," he replied.

The two partners went out of Meyers' store. Outside they paused. "There she goes," said Dakota. "We ain't got the money."

"No," said Joe, "we ain't. We got to get it"

"How?"

"Borrow it."

Dakota grunted. "Think you can borrow money in this town?" he asked. "After we buck Gordon? All these fellers will be afraid to loan. Shucks!"

Joe thought that over. "We can make a stab at it anyhow," he said.

A SQUARE GAMBLER

The two walked slowly down the street toward their tied horses. They were moving in the direction of the depot. Joe, eyes on the ground, was thinking, trying to figure a way over this stumbling block. Dakota never kept his eyes on the ground, they roved constantly. Dakota gave a little "Yip!" and moved forward swiftly. Joe, raising his eyes, saw his diminutive partner confronting a big man and a bigger woman. Dakota was pumping the man's hand and the woman was grinning broadly. Joe hastened forward.

"By golly!" there was excitement in Dakota's voice. "By golly! I ain't saw you since Deadwood. How you been, Tom? What you an' Anne doin' here?"

The big man laughed deep in his throat. It was the woman who answered. "We played out in Deadwood," she said. "We come over here to start a game."

"By golly, I'm glad to see yuh!" Dakota could not contain his exuberance. "I—" He saw Joe. "Come here, Joe," he commanded, and when Joe arrived, "This here is Joe Ewalt, my pardner. Joe, this is Long Tom Winnegan an' Anne."

Joe shook hands. He'd heard plenty about Long Tom Winnegan and his wife, Anne Winnegan, sometimes called Highcard Anny. Dakota, when he talked, generally mentioned the two. Long Tom was a gambler, a good, square shooter. Anne was as much a gambler as her husband. Generally the two ran a faro game, with Tom dealing and Anne keeping the case. From Dakota south and west the two had a reputation, a good reputation. A man got a run for his money at the Winnegans' game.

"Dakota's spoke of you," said Joe.

"Told a lot of lies, likely," said Anne. She was the talker of the two. Winnegan smiled, mouth and eyes working, and said very little.

"Where you goin' to set up, Tom?" questioned Dakota.

"We just got in. Anne an' me come out this mornin' lookin' for a place. You know of one, Dakota?"

"There's sev'ral," said Dakota. "This is kind of a bad town, Tom. The gamblin' is kind of in one man's hands."

Tom Winnegan shrugged. He had seen such conditions before; they didn't worry him. Anne said: "Shucks, Dakota. Where are some of these places?"

"There's Ben Terril's, down the street," said Dakota. "There's him, an' I reckon you could put up a tent if you had to. I—"

"Let's go see, Terril," suggested Winnegan. "We can talk a little. You an' me are due for a real pow-wow, Dakota."

The four walked on down the street, Dakota flanked by Anne Winnegan and her husband, Joe bringing up the rear. At the saloon where Joe and Dakota had left their horses, they turned in. Ben Terril was still behind the bar and to him Dakota introduced his friends and made known their wants. Ben Terril had heard of Tom Winnegan and Anne. At the time Terril hadn't a game in his place. He had tables

for accommodation of those who wished to play poker, but he hadn't a house man. The three entered into consultation while Dakota and Joe stood by.

Ben Terril was affable. One of two or three independent saloon men in Aspodel, he was open to a proposition. Winnegan made him one. Terril, after some thought, made explanation.

"Starr Gordon runs the games in this town," he said. "He's been tryin' to put one in here but so far I've stood him off. Gordon's bad, Winnegan."

Long Tom shrugged. "I run my own business an' I don't cut in on nobody," he stated. "Nobody cuts in on me."

"I've heard so," agreed Terril. "If you want to put a game in here, all right. You an' me can make a dicker, I reckon. It'll be your game, though, not mine." Terril was hedging.

"Suits me," said Winnegan.

There was some further talk before a bargain was struck. Terril surrounded himself with what precautions he could. Ben Terril didn't want to buck Starr Gordon directly, and yet he wanted Winnegan's game. He knew that it would bring him business. Winnegan, finally disgusted with Terril's hedging, brought out a plethoric roll of bills.

"I'll buy you out, Terril," he offered. "What will you take for the place, lock, stock an' barrel?"

Terril's eyes bulged at the sight of the roll. "I hadn't aimed to sell," he said.

"Everything's got a price," argued Winnegan.

"That's so," agreed Terril. "I'll take five-thousand, Winnegan."

"I'll give you four." Tom Winnegan began to peel off bills.

Terril demurred. They argued back and forth. A bargain was struck at forty-five hundred dollars. Winnegan put the money on the bar. "Now I'll hire you for a barkeeper," he said, laughing a little.

Again there was argument. Winnegan had his way. The big, blue-eyed man was persuasive and Terril succumbed to Winnegan's quiet persistence.

"All right, dawggone it," he said. "I'll stay an' keep bar for you. When do you want to move in?"

"Right away," returned Winnegan. "Our stuff's comin' today or tomorrow. Let's all have a drink."

They took their drinks at the bar, High-card Anne with the others.

Dakota Smith had eyed Winnegan's roll. "You wouldn't want to go into business with me an' Joe, would you, Tom?" he questioned.

"What business?" asked Winnegan, looking at the little man.

"The butcherin' business," said Dakota, ignoring Joe's elbow in his ribs. "Me an' Joe got a contract."

"Let's hear." Winnegan was interested.

"We got a contract to supply beef," said Dakota, moving away from Joe's fierce nudging. "We're kinda up against it."

Winnegan listened while Dakota explained. His blue eyes slowly examined Joe Ewalt from head to foot. When Dakota finished with a fierce tirade against Leonard's cautiousness, Winnegan laughed again.

"I'm in the money, Dakota," he said. "You made a sale. It'll take you twelve-hundred to run a month. I'll stake you."

Dakota Smith held out his hand. "Thanks, Tom," he said, with feeling.

Winnegan gravely shook hands with Dakota, then with Joe Ewalt. Again the big roll of bills was called into play. Ben Terril, watching across the bar, eyes bulging, watched the money slide off the roll. It hardly seemed touched.

"We'll square up with you at the end of the month, Tom," assured Dakota Smith happily. "Come on, Joe. Let's hunt up Leonard."

Joe Ewalt shifted uneasily. "I reckon I better tell you, Mister Winnegan," he

said. "Ben's told you about Starr Gordon. I had a run-in with him yesterday."

Anne Winnegan spoke. "Who gives a hoot?" she demanded. "Come on. You an' Dakota eat with us, then we'll see if our stuff's come in an' if it has you can help us move."

"Sure," grinned Dakota. "Sure, Anne."

The four had a meal in one of Aspodel's four restaurants, then went to the depot. Tom Winnegan's gambling layout had not arrived and so with expressions of mutual esteem, they parted, Joe and Dakota returning to their camp.

Riding out, the two passed Bent Draw. The little shack built on skids, that was the First Chance Saloon, was boarded up. The two bodies had been removed. No doubt there were two fresh graves in Aspodel's Boothill.

Riding on, up the railroad grade, the two partners swung off and climbing a ridge, looked down on the activity. Men swarmed along the grade. There was a puffing engine, pushing cars along as fast as the steel was laid. Further away they could see where the graders labored, cutting into ridges and pulling dirt up to make fills. The two men sat watching for awhile, then turned their horses and rode toward their camp. Civilization was coming, pushing steadily along. The partners were silent as they rode, then suddenly Dakota spoke.

"Rails!" he said. "I seen what it done to Kansas an' I seen what it done further east. This time next year I'll be a long ways from here, Joe."

They found their camp undisturbed. Turning out their horses they took axes and went to work. They were building a pole fence for a pasture. This camp was to be more or less permanent. It was so situated that they could haul from it for a considerable distance. Their beef contract would be filled from the camp.

In the morning, armed with the money borrowed so casually from Tom Winnegan, the two rode to the Rocking L. There they cut out fifteen head of cattle, paid the surly John Leonard, and with their drive went back the way they had come. Later when the fence was finished they would be able to handle more cattle at one time. Now they must content themselves with fifteen head.

They took their time with the cattle, moving them very slowly. Choused cattle lose weight and the two wanted these cool and in good shape when they reached their camp. They got in shortly after twelve, threw the cattle in the corral and went to the shack. When they had eaten they returned to the corral. The steers had had water but no feed other than the grass they had picked up on the drive. Later in the day when the sun lowered somewhat, the partners began the irksome business of butchering.

It was here that Dakota Smith proved his worth. Joe Ewalt, as most cowboys, could butcher a steer, but Dakota was an expert. He had served a long apprenticeship on game; buffalo, elk, deer, and antelope. Dakota knew how.

They finished their butchering the next day and with fifteen carcasses hog dressed, hanging in the shed, the partners were well content. The following morning Harve Mulligan appeared with his teams and wagon to haul the beef to town. Joe and Dakota helped the monkey-faced, short bodied, long armed Mulligan load his two wagons and watched him depart, skinning his jerkline teams expertly. Mulligan must follow the grade. He couldn't make much time. Joe and Dakota could leave long after the teamster and still arrive in plenty of time to help unload the beef at the commissary.

Accordingly they spent some time making a pole hide-rack and arranging the green hides on it. With that finished, they saddled up and rode toward Aspodel. They arrived in time to find Harve Mulligan

pulling up at the commissary building where Curtis Lodge, the long faced, bespectacled Commissary, inspected the carcasses and had them weighed. With their receipt slips signed by Lodge, the two mounted their horses and rode down into the town.

STARR GORDON STRIKES

Their first port of call was Long Tom Winnegan's. The shack that Ben Terril had built had been renovated. There was a sign above the door, Long Tom's Place, and inside, behind the newly cleaned bar was Ben Terril, polished until he almost glistened. Dakota and Joe walked up to the bar and admired the spectacle.

"Got his hair curled, Dakota," said Joe, squinting at Terril.

"Loaded with b'ar grease," commented Dakota. "That part's a leetle off in the middle, Ben."

Terril grinned good naturedly. "Go ahead an' guy me," he said. "Long Tom ain't here right now but he said if you come in you was to have anythin' in the house. What'll it be, gents?"

Dakota and Joe had done their work and had their receipt. They were feeling pretty good. Both ordered whisky and both took modest drinks. Joe didn't care a whole lot about hard liquor and Dakota knew from experience that if he himself took a big drink he would take another and then another. Dakota periodically went on a prolonged tear when those who tried to stop him were forced to take cover. The two were at the bar, glasses in hand, relishing the whisky as it rolled over their tongues, when they heard Ben Terril draw in his breath sharply and, turning, saw Starr Gordon entering the room. Behind Gordon was the man, Tex.

Gordon halted inside the door, stepped to one side and let Tex into the room. The big gambler looked around, saw Dakota and Joe Ewalt, and Ben Terril behind the bar. It was to Terril that Gordon directed his question.

"Where's Winnegan?"

"Him an' Anne are livin' in the Railroad Hotel," replied Terril. "I guess they're there."

"I want to see him," stated Gordon. "Tell him so."

"Sure," agreed Terril.

"We're goin' to have some law around here now." Starr Gordon jerked his thumb in the direction of the silent Tex. "There's been too much shootin' an' hell raisin'. Some of us got together an' put Tex on as Marshal."

"But the railroad has special officers." Terril was looking at Tex. "I don't—"

"Tex is goin' to look after things in town," snarled Gordon. "In town an' around it. He's goin' to pick out two other men an' keep things in line. He's already got one murder to investigate."

Starr Gordon's eyes settled on Joe Ewalt. Joe, standing unconcernedly beside the bar, had his right hand on his hip, just three inches above the butt of the .44 Russian.

"Speakin' to me or about me?" queried Joe, watching Gordon.

"If you can pull on the boot, wear it!" snapped Gordon. "Some of us went out to Kincade's. We found Kincade an' Crane. Kincade had been shot in the back."

"That's what I said," interrupted Joe. "I said Crane shot him in the back. You found Crane shot twice, *in the front!*"

Dakota Smith casually pulled his skinning knife from his belt sheath. Dakota's big rifle was leaning against the bar, close to his hand. Absently, with the sharp point of the eight inch blade, Dakota cleaned his finger nails. He was watching Tex.

"I ain't satisfied with what *you* say, Ewalt," snarled Gordon. "Crane was a friend of mine!"

Dakota finished with the nails of one hand and finding something between his teeth, reached through his beard with the knife point.

Joe interrupted Gordon. "I don't give a damn whether *you* are satisfied or not," he said. "If I was you, Gordon, I'd speak my piece where nobody can't hear 'til I got in practice. Someway you don't quite make it stick."

"Damn you!" began Gordon angrily. "I'll show you whether I can make it stick or not. You . . ."

Dakota's arm described a short half circle. Something glistened in the dim light of the bar room and there was a distinct "Thunk!" The knife was quivering in the shack wall, a bare three inches from Tex' head. Starr Gordon broke off his words short.

The Knife Quivered In The Wall, A Bare Three Inches From His Head

"Damme!" drawled Dakota. "Thar was a packrat an' I sure missed him. I reckon I'll have to take to usin' the rifle." His gnarled, brown, dirty hand slid down. The big Sharps came up. There was a sharp click, click, as the hammer came back and the bore of the big rifle swung in a casual arc. Somehow that arc seemed to encompass the two men near the door. Tex didn't like the looks of that big hole in the steel. He shifted uneasily. Starr Gordon scowled.

"I'll see you later, Ewalt," he threatened. "You got an idea yo're pretty big. You—"

"Get about five more men, Gordon." There was scorn in Joe Ewalt's voice. "I heard around here that you were hell on wheels an' no axle grease. You go get three four more men an' come back. I'll be on view."

Gordon, his face a snarling mask, backed out of the door through which Tex had unobtrusively preceded him. Starr Gordon would have liked to kill Joe Ewalt, there was no doubt of that. There was also no doubt that he was afraid. A .45 Sharps is a powerful deterrent of passion.

Ben Terril let go a long pent breath. "You done it now!" he exclaimed.

Joe turned angrily toward Dakota Smith. Joe was feeling the single drink of whisky he had taken. "The damn' big bluff!" snapped Joe. "Dakota, next time you keep out of it. He was all set."

Dakota limped across the room and retrieved his knife. "Hawg!" he said carelessly. "Want to have all the fun? It's more fun to make a man back down than it is to cut down on him. You see that Tex jump?"

The grim humor of the old man struck Joe Ewalt. Suddenly he laughed. "Damn you, Dakota," said Joe. "That calls for another drink."

"No," Dakota was reasonable, "if I take another drink I'll go on an' get drunk. You an' me are due to go home."

"I told Gordon to get his bunch an' come back," Joe expostulated. "I said I'd be on view."

"You will be," promised Dakota. "You'll be in an' out of town all the time. Come on, Joe. We got to get back."

Joe Ewalt was reluctant. Dakota argued and Ben Terril endorsed the argument. Ben Terril was afraid. Finally Dakota prevailed. Joe, surlily, promised to be ready to leave as soon as he had gone to Meyers'. There were a few things he wanted to buy. Dakota accompanied his partner to the door, watched Joe go up the street and then came back to Ben Terril.

"Gordon is makin' a play," said Dakota to the saloon man. "You tell Long Tom to watch hisse'f."

Terril nodded vigorously, "I will," he promised. "You tell yore partner to watch hisse'f, too. Gordon's bad!"

"I know," interrupted Dakota. "But he ain't bad by hisse'f. He'll be sneakin' around. He's run Aspodel for some time. It makes him sore to have somebody cut in. Joe an' me'll watch out."

"Damned if I can see how you got away with it," marveled Terril. "I looked for Gordon to shoot. I can't see—"

"Y'ere's why he didn't." Dakota patted the stock of the Sharps. "So long, Ben, I'm comin' in one of these days an' git drunker'n a hoot owl." With Sharps across his arm, Dakota Smith limped out.

When he had finished at Meyers' store, Joe Ewalt was still reluctant to leave town. Dakota was ready to go. They argued, Joe angrily, Dakota persuasively. Dakota stuck to his point and had his way. They got their horses and went home without seeing either Long Tom or Anne Winnegan.

That night, for supper, the partners ate the last of their venison. It was time to lay in a fresh supply. Early the next morning, therefore, Joe Ewalt took his light Winchester .38-55 single shot and went out after deer. Dakota pottered around the camp, cleaning up and doing a little work on the fence. Dakota was not particularly fond of ax work, it was woman's work to Dakota's notion. He had too long been among the Sioux. Joe was still out when Long Tom Winnegan rode in. Long Tom dismounted from his horse and came over to where Dakota waited for him.

The two exchanged greetings. "How you makin' out here?" queried Winnegan.

"Purty good," answered Dakota. "We'll make a little money, Tom."

Winnegan nodded. "Heard you was in town yesterday," he said. "Terril told me."

"Uhhuh."

"How is this pardner of yore's?"

"He's a good boy."

"Yeah. So you say. How is he with a gun?"

Dakota scratched his head. "I don't rightly know," he answered. "I ain't never seen him shoot. He acts like he knowed which end was which."

"I been makin' inquiries," said Winnegan. "Starr Gordon is the man that run a bluff on Ben Thompson in Dodge. He's hell on wheels."

"So?" drawled Dakota.

"Yeah. An' they say Tex Casey is 'most as bad."

"Do tell?" Dakota scratched his head again. "Mebbe I'd better look into Joe's shootin' a little. If he ain't so good I might prowl around a little with the Sharps."

Winnegan grunted. "Payday Saturday," he stated. "You goin' to be in?"

"I reckon."

"I hear I'm goin' to get quite a play." Winnegan smiled thinly.

"Yeah," said Dakota. "They got law in Aspodel, now."

"Law, hell!"

"That's what I said. I reckon we'll be in, Tom."

Tom Winnegan said, "Thanks." There was silence for a moment. Winnegan moved about, inspecting the camp. Presently he went to his horse. His mission had been accomplished.

Dakota limped after him. "Why sure we'll be in, Tom," Smith repeated as Winnegan mounted. "Me an' Joe both."

"There's several that will be on the lookout," said Winnegan, from his saddle. "Dakota, there's somethin' stirrin'. There's somethin' between the railroad men an' the natives."

Dakota just nodded. "Bad blood," he said. "These fellers that have been here don't like the road pushin' through. The railroad men don't give a damn. There's always been that feelin' an' there always will be."

"A damn' good man to hold down Aspodel would be a Godsend," said Winnegan. "There'll be trouble sure as fate."

Dakota shrugged. "There's always trouble, Tom," he said. "So long."

Long Tom Winnegan said, "So long," and rode away.

When Joe Ewalt came back to the camp leading his horse with a buck across the saddle, it took only a glance for Dakota to see that his partner was mad all the way through.

Joe dumped the buck from the saddle, swore, kicked at the inert pile of meat, and fell to pulling off his gear.

"What's in yore hair?" asked Dakota.

"I run into Leonard," said Joe. "That's what took me so long. Leonard hinted around about us, Dakota. He said he hoped we wasn't butcherin' more cattle than we bought. I asked him what he meant an' he said he'd been missin' stock."

"Hell!" swore Dakota. "An' then what?"

"I told him to check up on us," answered Joe. "He acted fair enough. Said he'd knowed me a long time an' you, too. Said he didn't figure it was us but that some of these meat contractors was rustlin' on him. I told him we'd be on the lookout."

"Who's got the other contract?" demanded Dakota.

Joe shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "I know that Gordon wanted the one we got. Lodge would of give it to him, too, but there was two engineers there from the main office an' they give it to us."

Dakota thought a moment. "Gordon, huh?" he said. "Likely he's got the old contract already. That'ud make it fit."

"Make what fit?"

"The rustlin'."

Joe thought that over.

They skinned out the deer and quartered it, hanging the quarters in the shed. Then, with steaks from the loin, they went to the shack and cooked. As they ate they discussed their work for the next few days. In the morning they would go to the Rocking L and get their week's quota of steers; then it would be slaughter and butcher for two days before the load was ready to go in.

That afternoon the two worked on their fence, finishing it, and when they came in they were tired and ready to call it a day. It was about five o'clock when they came back from closing the last gap in the pole barrier. They put shovels and axes in the shack and were loafing outside the door when they heard a horse coming up the creek. Turning so that they could see, they discerned a tall figure bouncing in the saddle on a little black horse. For a moment neither could place the rider. It was Dakota who finally announced their visitor.

"Lodge," said Dakota. "Now what in hell is he doin' out here?"

It was not long before the question was answered. Lodge drew up and was talking before he left the saddle. The Commissary, lean, lanky, bespectacled, and pale-faced, was wrathy and voluble.

"What do you mean sendin' in bad beef, Ewalt?" he demanded as he cocked his leg over the cantle and slid down. "Your contract's canceled right now. You—"

Joe Ewalt was on his feet. "Bad beef?" he exclaimed. "We never sent in any bad beef. That stuff was fresh killed and dressed. What are you talkin' about, Lodge?"

The Commissary was on the ground. "I mean what I said," he snapped. "Some of that stuff you sent in was spoiled. There's more than twenty men sick right now an' the doctor says it's the beef, couldn't be nothin' else."

"Sick?" Dakota limped into the talk.

"I mean sick! Pukin' an' their bellies achin' an' some of 'em just passed out."

"I don't get this," said Joe slowly. "We killed that stuff an' butchered it. It was all right."

"That don't make no difference," shrilled Lodge. "I come out to tell you that your contract's canceled. You ain't to deliver no more."

"You can't do that," snapped Joe.

"The hell I can't. Read your contract. You're supposed to deliver good, fresh killed stuff. It's got to pass our doctor's inspection if we say so, an' Doc says it was the beef that poisoned those men. Don't haul any more, Ewalt."

Joe Ewalt had nothing to say. For the moment he was stunned. Dakota alternately stared at his partner and at Lodge. Dakota, like Ewalt, was speechless. Lodge peered over his glasses from one man to the other.

"You never should of had that contract in the first place," he shrilled. "You ain't a responsible bidder. Starr Gordon told me not to trust you."

"Starr Gordon wanted the contract himself!" Joe Ewalt snapped.

"What if he did? He had the old contract an' he was entitled to this one. He—" Lodge stopped short. Apparently he realized that he had said too much.

"But," began Joe, "we told Leonard that we'd take steers from him."

"That ain't my misfortune." Lodge was putting a toe in his stirrup. "I've told you not to deliver no more beef."

The lathy man swung awkwardly into his saddle, stared balefully at Joe Ewalt for a moment, and then turned his horse and rode away down the creek. Joe's eyes followed him. When Lodge had turned an angle and was hidden by a clump of trees, Joe turned to Dakota.

DAKOTA PLAYS HIS CARDS

"Now what the hell?" he said.

Dakota was staring off toward the ridge, his brow furrowed and his lips puckered under his beard. Dakota was figuring. Joe was quiet for the moment.

Dakota turned. "You don't reckon that beef could of gone bad hangin' in the shed over night?" he queried slowly.

"Of course not!"

Dakota said, "Huh!" gently.

"What are we goin' to do, Dakota?" Joe questioned. "We told Leonard we'd take the steers. We borrowed from Winnegan. We—"

"We're goin' to sit tight for a couple of days," said Dakota.

"But what do you think?" Joe persisted.

Dakota nodded as though he had reached a decision. "I don't think nothin'," he answered. "Tomorrow I'm goin' to make a scout around in the mornin'. Suppose you do the same thing. We might learn somethin'."

"I don't have to learn nothin'!" Sudden anger flared in Joe Ewalt's eyes. "I know enough right now. Starr Gordon's behind this. I'm goin' to ride in to Aspodel an' call him. He can't get away with nothin' like this!"

Dakota shook his head. "You got yore war paint on," he said. "Don't never go off half-cocked. Tomorrow we scout. I'd sure as hell like to find them rustlers. Say, Joe, tomorrow you ride over an' tell Leonard about this an' tell him we can't take the steers this week, that's what you do."

"Somebody will have to tell him," said Joe glumly. "I reckon I'd better. You come with me, Dakota."

Dakota shook his head. Under his beard his lips twitched a little. "Nope," said Dakota Smith. "I got other rats to trap."

They let it go at that. Joe was filled with supposition and conjecture, but Dakota maintained a stolid silence. The old man had crawled into his shell and pulled in his neck. There was just as much use in talking to Dakota as there was in talking to a snapping turtle. Joe gave it up.

The two cooked supper and ate, Joe with half an appetite. After the meal Dakota

became suddenly loquacious. He fell to reminiscing, recalled old happenings, things that he had seen. All of the things he recalled had to do with fights, gun fights generally. Dakota had seen many a man go down. He didn't tell of his own exploits, however. Joe, interested, listened and asked questions. Dakota answered them and finally, pulling out his knife, threw it languidly at a pine box that had contained supplies. The knife stuck and quivered.

"I used to be pretty fair with a knife," drawled Dakota. "Shucks, when I first lit out here a man had to know how to throw a knife. We didn't have them fancy pistols."

Joe knew that Dakota was deadly with a throwing knife. He also knew that the old man never wasted a shot from the Sharps. Dakota could make that big rifle roll over and play dead.

"You ever shoot much, Joe?" queried Dakota casually. "That is, with yore pistol?"

Joe slid out the weapon. There was still light, plenty of light to see some little distance. He looked at the big Smith & Wesson, .44 Russian model.

"I shot some," said Joe. Joe didn't tell Dakota that for more than ten years a gun had been his constant companion. That never a day went by but that he practiced "dry shooting," pulling and snapping the gun on an empty cylinder. He didn't tell Dakota that he had burned many boxes of ammunition learning to pull, and throw his shots.

"I still like a rifle," Dakota remarked, rising and strolling over to the packing box for his knife. "One of them little guns is all right, but—"

Dakota left that hanging in the air.

Joe got up. "A rifle's all right," he said. "You can do things with a short gun that you can't do with a rifle, though."

"Such as?" hinted Dakota, strolling back with his knife.

"I dunno if I can do it now or not," said Joe, grinning. "I'll try to show you." Something prompted him, made him want to show Dakota. He slipped the gun in its holster, bent down and picked up a chip. The box that Dakota had used as a target was perhaps twenty feet away.

"Look," said Joe.

He stood erect. His right hand he held level, elbow clamped against his side, back of the hand up. He put the chip on the back of his hand. "You watch the chip," directed Joe Ewalt.

The hand dropped from beneath the piece of wood. Dakota's eyes followed the chip downward. As it struck the ground, the .44 roared, leaping in Joe's hand. The gun seemed to stutter and then was still. Dakota walked over to the box and examined it with interest. There were four holes in the box.

"You missed once," chided Dakota.

"I shot four times," refuted Joe. He had broken the Smith & Wesson and was reloading, stuffing in the blunt nosed shells.

"Oh," said Dakota, accepting the explanation. "That's pretty fair shootin', Joe."

It was more than fair and Joe knew it. Still he said nothing.

"I wisht I'd saw that the other day," remarked Dakota. "I'd of talked different to a fellow than I did."

Joe glanced at his partner. Dakota had pulled into his shell again. There was no more conversation. Joe grinned to himself. Dakota had never seen him shoot before. The old man had built the conversation and brought it to a head in order that he could see Joe in action. He was cute, Dakota was.

In the morning both men saddled horses after breakfast and left the camp. Dakota parted from Joe with a careless, "So long."

Joe went to the Rocking L. Leonard was there and to the old ranchman Joe told his troubles. Leonard was not overly

sympathetic. It was tough that Joe's contract was broken, but Leonard never had liked the idea of the railroaders eating Rocking L beef, anyhow. The old man was upset about the rustling and he didn't ask Joe many questions, wanting rather to talk about his own troubles and curse the railroaders.

Joe, through with Leonard, went out to the corrals and watched two Rocking L men working horses. Joe didn't want to go back to camp immediately.

Dakota Smith, as soon as he had left Joe, circled back. He had a plan in mind, had Dakota. There was going to be a showdown in Aspodel pretty quickly, a showdown between Joe Ewalt and Starr Gordon. Dakota knew that. He had talked like a good one to keep Joe from riding in the night before. Now Dakota had an idea. A fight was good, he realized, but the fight had to be arranged to suit him, Dakota Smith.

He followed along behind his partner, keeping well back, and presently dropping down from a ridge, rode up a little valley. There were Rocking L cattle in the valley and, so Dakota knew, there should be a Rocking L rider nearby. Dakota crossed the valley and climbed the other ridge. He waited there, patiently, with the contempt of time learned from the Sioux. Finally he saw a man on horseback coming toward him. Dakota grinned, mounted and rode down into the valley again. The ridge was six hundred yards distant. In the valley Dakota calmly selected a Rocking L steer, lifted the rifle and fired. The steer dropped and Dakota rode over to it, reloading the Sharps.

He waited beside the steer until he saw the rider show on the ridge. It was too far for a man to discern features or even articles of wearing apparel. Dakota lifted the Sharps and threw a big slug squarely at the feet of the horse the man rode. The horse reared and was reined back over the ridge. That rider would go for reinforcements, Dakota knew. He ran to where he had left his horse, mounted, and with the Sharps across the saddle, rode pell mell for Aspodel, not trying to hide his trail but rather making it plain.

In Aspodel with his tracks mingling with countless others, Dakota turned. He wasted no time in town but rather headed back for the camp, and now he was careful. There might be good trackers with the Rocking L when they arrived. Dakota followed the grade where his horse tracks mingled with the tracks of mules and other horses. Back to camp he went. At the camp he dismounted, unsaddled, and with a pair of pinchers pulled the soft iron shoes from his horse. With the horse barefooted, he turned the animal loose. The horse was a bay. Bay horses were as common as seeds in a dill pickle. The Rocking L would be properly stirred up.

Joe Ewalt arrived in camp late that afternoon. Joe was full of news. He related details to Dakota. Joe had been at the Rocking L corrals when a rider came in, his horse in a lather. The rider had spotted a rustler at his work, had ridden down on the man and had been shot at. He had returned for reinforcements.

"We went aboilin' out of there, I can tell you," related Joe. "I rode with Old Man Leonard. We found the steer that had been beefed and there was a plain trail from it that went right square into Aspodel. The Old Man is just a frothin'. I left him in town cussin' Lodge an' the railroad an' everybody."

Dakota nodded. He didn't seem particularly excited. "I pulled the shoes off that bay I had this mornin'," he announced. "He's b'ar foot. Better not ride him."

Joe said, "Uhhuh," absently. He was not particularly interested in the bay. "I ought to go back to town," he announced. "There'll be hell poppin' tonight an' tomorrow the whole Rockin' L will be in. Leonard's payin' 'em tomorrow."

"We'll all go in tomorrow," said Dakota. "It's payday on the road, too."

"But no payday for us." Joe remembered the broken contract. "Damn it, Dakota, I can't figure what happened. Can you?"

"Not exactly," drawled Dakota. "I got ideas though. I'm goin' to pull out early tomorro', Joe. I won't see you 'til late."

"Where you goin'?"

"Out!" flatly.

"You want me to stay here in camp? I ain't goin' to. I'm goin' to town."

Dakota grinned. "Ride over an' go in with the Rockin' L boys," he suggested.

"If yo're goin' to quit me, I will." Joe was angry.

"Fine," agreed Dakota. "Let's cook an' eat."

Joe was surly throughout the meal and during the time following it. When they turned in he growled, "Good night," which Dakota answered cheerfully. Dakota was pretty well pleased with himself.

In the morning Joe wakened to find his partner gone. More angry than ever, Joe dressed, drank a cup of coffee and went out. There was no sign of Dakota anywhere. The old man simply was not around. Joe swore. Dakota had taken the one horse they had kept up. It was up to Joe to wrangle on foot if he wanted to go any place.

Driving horses on foot is a trying business. Joe's temper was not an inch long when, about ten o'clock, he managed to get the horses in the pen. On top of his troubles afoot the horse he saddled chose to pitch. Joe had quite a time before he left the camp for the Rocking L.

At the Rocking L he found preparations. The boys were going to town. They were cleaning up, shaving, putting on good clothes. There was a certain grimness prevalent. Old Man Leonard had a good crew. From the talk in the bunkhouse Joe gathered that the Rocking L planned to prop up Aspodel and see what was underneath.

About four o'clock the crew pulled out. Old Man Leonard had already gone into town. Joe learned that the Old Man was going to complain to the railroad officials, the contractors, and whatever law he could find in town.

"It won't do no good though," said Joe's informant. "We'll have to clean the place out." The cowpuncher seemed pleased with the prospect.

SHOWDOWN AT ASPODEL

They reached Aspodel before seven o'clock. Joe having come in with the Rocking L men naturally stayed with them, which was just as Dakota had planned. Aspodel was waking up, stretching, getting ready for pay night. Joe and two Rocking L boys ate supper together and then walked out, seeking amusement. Joe was alert and grim. He knew that he had to be watchful. Starr Gordon was loose in Aspodel. So was the man, Tex, and whatever other ruffians Tex had chosen to help him. Joe was careful.

They took a drink or two, collected two more Rocking L men and went into another saloon. John Leonard was there. John Leonard was about half drunk and clearly ugly. He was telling the bartender that the whisky was rotgut and no good. Joe and the Rocking L men backed up John Leonard. They were having a good time, looking for trouble.

The street was filled with railroad men, cowboys, teamsters, riffraff of all kinds. The dance halls were busy. The stores were busy. Aspodel was wide awake and clicking.

Joe heard a man say something about the game at Winnegan's. It reminded him. He collected his friends and they went down toward the depot, toward Winnegan's place. Leonard had left them. Joe saw

him talking to a quiet faced man who smoked a big cigar and listened while Old John laid down the law. The man with the cigar was one of the contractors on the job, Len Tyber. Joe thought momentarily of taking his troubles concerning the beef contract to Tyber. He shrugged. What was the use? The thing for him, Joe Ewalt, to do was hunt up Starr Gordon. Gordon was too big for the town. Joe, the whisky working under his belt, feeling just right, wanted to see Gordon.

Joe and his companions went in to Winnegan's. Long Tom's Place was filled with men. The kerosene lights were bright. Terril and another man perspired behind the bar. There was a poker game running. An impassive fellow that Joe Ewalt didn't know, was dealing blackjack. In the rear of the crowded room Long Tom Winnegan was dealing Faro with Anne Winnegan keeping the case and acting as lookout. The space around the layout was crowded. Joe Ewalt recognized Starr Gordon's big white hat and pushed toward it.

Hard elbows, harder face, made a path for Joe Ewalt among the scowling railroaders. The Rocking L men trailed after him, bringing curses with them. Joe saw Tex, the pseudo marshal, and behind him loitered Harve Mulligan. Starr Gordon was bucking the game, making heavy plays, losing and winning. Joe shoved past Starr Gordon, pushed a hanger-on from the lookout's chair and slid into it. Long Tom Winnegan looked up from the layout.

"I'll lookout for yore game," Joe nodded to Winnegan. "You need a lookout."

"Get out of that chair!" Tex elbowed forward.

"Go to hell!" Joe slid the .44 Russian around into his lap.

"This man is acting as my lookout," said Winnegan impassively. "I'm pardners with him on another deal. Any objections?"

Starr Gordon was frowning. "I'll make an objection," he snarled.

Winnegan nodded. "I'm sorry, Ewalt," he said.

"All right," Joe settled in the chair. "I won't lookout but I'm goin' to stay here." His voice was stubborn.

Winnegan shrugged. Highcard Anny smiled up suddenly from the case.

"Make yore bets," droned Winnegan.

Joe glancing down at the case saw that there were not more than four more turns in the box. Starr Gordon was piling chips, betting a stack on the Jack of Spades to win. He piled another stack on the trey of hearts, put a copper on it.

With his bets made Starr Gordon looked insolently up at Joe Ewalt. There was something coming now and Joe tensed to meet it. Starr Gordon's voice sneered at Long Tom Winnegan.

"Yo're choosy about yore pardners," said Starr Gordon. "That's the skunk that sent spoiled beef into Aspodel."

Instantly behind Gordon and about the Faro layout, voices began, threateningly, muttering curses, mouthing words of anger. Starr Gordon could not have made a better play to put the railroad men behind him. He took advantage of the opportunity.

"You damn' cowpunchers—" he began, definitely aligning himself.

Joe Ewalt slid out of the chair. His face was a little white, not with fear but with anger.

"You—" Joe's sentence went uncompleted. A motion behind Tex distracted him. Harve Mulligan had moved, was trying to slip into the close packed crowd. Instantly Joe Ewalt had the answer to the question that had puzzled him. Harve Mulligan! There was where the poisoned meat had come from, of course. Mulligan had had plenty of time on the way in with the load. It must be Mulligan! There was a disturbance back by the door of Long Tom Winnegan's place but no one

noticed it, no one paid heed. The situation at the Faro layout was too tense.

"Yeah, me!" growled Gordon. The man sensed an advantage. Here was his opportunity. "You an' yore crooked pardner here have been tryin' to put it over in Aspodel. You can't get away with it. Yo're a damn' poisoner an' that box is stuffed!" Starr Gordon's left hand slapped down over the box.

Long Tom Winnegan tried to come to his feet. Behind him a hard faced railroad man moved swiftly, locking his arms about the gambler. The crowd was more than muttering now; there was a steady, ominous babble of voices. Above them came one, shrill and insistent.

"Lemme through! Lemme through!"

Joe Ewalt's left hand shot out, finger pointing to Mulligan. For the moment Joe had forgotten Starr Gordon.

"Mulligan!" Joe's voice was hoarse. "You poisoned that meat. You—"

Old Dakota Smith broke through the circle. In Dakota's right hand was his Sharps. In his left was an empty bottle. There was a mixture of hate and triumph on Dakota's face.

"Damn you, Mulligan," roared Dakota Smith. "I got you! Follered yore trail an' found where you'd throwed it out! I got you!"

The crowd was tense, silent now. The big railroader still held Long Tom Winnegan. Tex, his hand on his gun butt, watched alertly. Harve Mulligan, face white and twisted with fear, almost screamed three words, "Starr, you said—"

Joe Ewalt whirled and faced Starr Gordon. Gordon, his left hand still on the box, stood poised. "You, Gordon!" Accusation in Joe Ewalt's voice. "You got Mulligan to poison the meat. Yo're the man!"

Starr Gordon made his play. He was bad, Starr Gordon; bad and cunning; but in a corner he would fight. His right hand flashed back under the tails of his long, broadcloth coat. Joe Ewalt's right hand dipped and swung forward. Motion for motion they matched their draws. The .44 Russian cleared the top of its holster a fraction of a second before Starr Gordon's gun came clear. The big calibered Smith & Wesson crashed once, and then again. Starr Gordon, gun drawn, made a little choking cry. The gun fell from his fingers and Starr Gordon reeled back, falling, his left hand outflung. There, in his left hand, was a flash of white, a playing card.

With a yelp of pure delight a Rocking

Starr Gordon Made His Play

L cowboy flung himself toward Tex, clubbing down with upflung gun. Dakota Smith, face a bearded mask of fury, was on Harve Mulligan, had him on the floor, the long blade of his knife at Mulligan's throat. Amidst the babble and clamor of the crowd, Joe Ewalt lifted his voice.

"Hold it! Stand still!"

The Rocking L men, taken by surprise but acting instinctively, guns out, faces hard, swung into action. They flanked the faro layout where Long Tom Winnegan, freed now from the railroader's grasp, held a gun in his competent hand, and where Highcard Anny struggled up from her chair. The Rocking L men were ready for trouble. Tex lay on the floor, dead to the world for the moment. Lacking a leader the railroad men recoiled.

Still it might have gone hard with Joe Ewalt and the cowmen. There were guns in the crowd, guns and men to use them, but from the door two men fought their

way forward, John Leonard and Len Tyber the contractor. They pushed through, shouting orders, quelling the turmoil by the very force of their voices and their presence. A railroader straightened up from Starr Gordon's body. He held his hand aloft, a playing card in his fingers.

"Tryin' to stuff the box," he yelled, and the crowd, catching his meaning, roared. Starr Gordon, in a last desperate play, had tried to put an extra card in the box of the faro layout.

Tyber, crowding to the front, made himself heard. John Leonard had reached the Rocking L men. The cowmen were putting up their guns. Gradually the tumult was quelled. Dakota Smith came up from the floor, dragging Mulligan with him. Mulligan was spilling words, babbling. Men stopped their talking to hear what he said.

". . . Starr Gordon hired me," babbled Mulligan. "He wanted the contract an' Lodge was goin' to give it to him when Joe cut in. Starr was sore at Joe because Joe'd killed Brice Crane. He give me the stuff an' I put it in a carcass when I hauled in the beef. It wasn't nothin' but ipecac anyhow."

Tyber shouted orders. "Get out. Outside. Clear the place!"

The Rocking L men with Leonard at their head, pushed forward. They shoved the crowd back, toward the door, clearing the room. Men had recognized Tyber and knew him for the boss. They went reluctantly, but they went. Long Tom Winnegan closed the door behind the last of them and turned, panting. "Tried to stuff my box, the son!" gasped Long Tom.

Starr Gordon lay on the floor, motionless. The white hat was gone from his head. The broadcloth coat lay open and there, on the front of his white shirt, just above a little trickling blood stain, lay a copper disk fallen from the Faro layout. Starr Gordon had made his play.

It was Tyber who took charge, Tyber who asked the questions. Harve Mulligan and Tex, sitting up now and holding his head, answered those questions. Mulligan, with Dakota Smith's grim eyes upon him, was in a mood for truth telling. He had, as he confessed, put ipecac on the meat at Gordon's orders. Ipecac can make a man mighty sick.

Starr Gordon, supplying meat for his own contract, had rustled beef from John Leonard. Leonard nodded and glanced at Joe Ewalt who was standing by. The tension was gone now and he was feeling the let down. Dakota Smith was watching his young partner, feeling about as Joe did. It was Dakota who limped to the bar and returned with a bottle, forcing it into Joe's hand.

"Y'ere," ordered Dakota. "Take a drink. You need it."

But Joe Ewalt disregarded the offer. He stood by, bottle forgotten, while Len Tyber pronounced judgment, ordered Harve Mulligan and Tex out of town, vowed that he would fire Lodge before morning.

Tyber turned to Joe Ewalt when he had finished and looked over the young fellow searchingly. Winnegan and Anne were beside Joe, Anne with her hand on Joe's shoulder. Joe Ewalt had doubtless saved Long Tom Winnegan's life.

Tyber spoke to Joe. "You see me tomorrow, Ewalt," he directed. We can fix up that contract of yours."

Joe nodded, wordlessly.

Dakota Smith twitched his partner's sleeve. "If you ain't goin' to use that bottle, give it to me," he whispered fiercely. He took the bottle from Joe's limp hand. Turning, raising the bottle, Dakota Smith's eyes fell upon Starr Gordon's body. Dakota lowered the bottle and limped forward. He bent over Starr Gordon and straightening, held up the little copper disk.

"All bets coppered," said Dakota Smith.

TRICK GUNNERS

by COTEAU GENE

Wyatt Earp was running the gambler out of town.

There Was A Saying In The West That "Trick Gunners Were Yellow"—Yet Flash Halliday Shot His Own Epitaph

"Heading out, Flash?" Town Marshal Henderson waved a hand at an assortment of baggage piled on the hand-truck on the depot platform.

Flash Halliday smiled a grim, thin-lipped smile and nodded his head slightly toward Wyatt Earp. "Earp claims there's not enough room in this town for both of us. I'm a lone wolf; he heads a pack. I might argue the matter with Wyatt, but even if I beat his best hand I'd lose. You know that," Flash added.

Henderson flushed, the Earp gang had his goat and everybody knew it. Only such short-gun artists as Flash Halliday had the guts to say it. Henderson was a good man according to the ideas of Carsonville. The law and order crowd, a slim crowd, had hired him. His employers didn't care for Flash Halliday, but Henderson had been able to keep Flash from being too rank. Now he rather sympathized with Flash as he, too, was a lone wolf. He could depend only on the moral support of his employers. Against the Earp gang, he was in as bad a fix as Halliday.

Earp stood, his back against the operator's window, his gang scattered along the platform, and grinned sneeringly.

"Look here, Henderson," Earp cut in, "I'm not driving Halliday out of town. He's moving out entirely of his own notion. I offered him a lay here. He claims it ain't good enough, so I've recommended a town where a lone wolf like him can do business."

"Yes? Is it any of my business which town you recommend?"

"No, it ain't, but I'll tell you. I've recommended Burma. It's a good location for Flash, plenty money comes there and nobody's really running the town. An artist with guns and cards, like Flash here,

can damn quick be Ace High in Burma."

Henderson frowned, then spoke boldly to the gunman leader. "I wish to Gawd *you'd* picked on Burma in place of Carsonville, if you think it's such a soft snap."

Earp laughed, "Carsonville suits me, but I may go up there, yet, if it should get slow here."

Flash scowled, "Look here, Earp, if you want the damn town, go ahead and take it. I don't care to be pushed out whenever you take a notion."

Earp laughed again, "Go on, I was just a bunk-housing. I'll promise not to bother you Flash."

Henderson cut in, "I think Earp means that, Halliday. In fact, I'll bet a hundred against a double-eagle he won't."

"I might cover that, for insurance," said Flash, "only it isn't enough. Make it a thousand and if Earp and his outfit don't show up within a year, you win."

"You're on," said Henderson. "On up to $5000 if you like."

"Make it $2000. Honor bet. That would be a fair consideration for me pulling my freight."

"$2000 it is," agreed Henderson.

Earp frowned, but said nothing.

"Now we've made a bet," said Halliday, "mind telling me why you're so sure Earp will not come up?"

"Burma is young Dick Jackson's town. That's why!"

"Never heard of him," said Flash, "who's he and how come?" He addressed Earp rather than Henderson.

"He's a fairy story," grunted Earp. "Old man Jackson runs the big store up there. Some fools claim young Dick is a trick-gunner." Earp sneered, "Trick-gunner, hell! There ain't no tricks better'n a finger-draw of a six-shooter. Any fool that fusses with tricks is too yaller to kill a man even if he did have something. I've seen plenty as had a rep for gun tricks, but none never bothered me. They're yaller!"

"Who's this Jackson killed?" asked Flash.

"Never heard he killed anybody," replied the marshal. "He don't seem to be built that way, but I wouldn't care to egg him on to try killing me."

Flash sneered, "No, I guess *you* wouldn't. You got bull courage, also cow sense, Henderson. You know you're not fancy or fast. I've heard of the trick-gunners myself, but I'm like Earp, none ever went against me."

"Hell, you think you're a trick-gunner yourself, Halliday. I know that! But you're moving," Earp grunted.

Halliday's black eyes flashed, "Not because of anything you can do, Earp. I'm moving because of this gang of yours. I could get you, easy, even if you do boast you can draw that ten inch barrel gun faster than anybody else can draw a shorter one. That stuff is hog-wash and you know it. Order your gang to leave this depot and not come back until after the train leaves, if you think you can draw that thing so damn fast."

Earp cursed. "I'd shore tell 'em to high-tail if they'd go, but I ain't got any strings on those men, I tell you. I could tell 'em to go, but they would tell me to go to hell."

"Try it," said Halliday.

Earp addressed two men who leaned against the baggage truck. "I wish you'd round up the boys and take 'em over to the Carson House and buy them and yourselves a drink. Here's the dinero." Earp tossed a gold eagle to one of the men.

With a laugh, the man tossed it back. "We want to see the train come in," he demurred. "The operator says there's a troupe of show gals on board going up to the capitol."

Earp grinned at Halliday.

"That was a stall!" snarled Halliday. "You didn't *order* them to go. You just offered to buy them a drink."

"Besides which," gritted Henderson, "that show troupe went through yesterday."

"Some day," said Earp, "Carsonville will appoint a new town marshal."

"I hope he'll have more guts than I've got," sighed Henderson. "Here comes the bull-jine, Flash. Take an old fool's advice, don't crowd young Dick Jackson, run a decent game and let it go at that."

"Has this Jackson a gang back of him?"

"Not that I ever heard of."

Flash Halliday smiled wolfishly, showing long, white, sharp teeth. "Only *one* man can be boss of *any town*," he said. Then he flashed a sneer at Henderson and Earp. "The prospect pleases me," he said. He swung aboard the smoking car without offering to shake hands.

"I'd like to see it," said Henderson to Earp.

"There won't be nothin' to see," replied Earp. "Ever hear of two yeller-belly, trick-gunners going against each other? They are vipers, not rattlesnakes."

Henderson shrugged and walked off the platform. He turned to cast a glance at the moving train. "I'd like to see it," he sighed.

"I," said Flash Halliday to the bartender of the Eldorado, "am Flash Halliday. I have come here to run a stud game. This joint looks as good as any in town. I will set-up right over there. I pay 10 per cent."

"You'll have to see Sport Mullins, he owns this joint, and Sport will have to talk to Dick Jackson," said the bartender. He added, "It don't make no difference to me."

"I'm not asking anybody!" said Halliday. "I'm telling you. I'm setting up right over there. The dray will be here in a minute with my table. Tell the bar-flies to belly up and you can have the honor of introducing me, or I'll do it myself. But—" Flash paused, "if I have to do it myself we'll have to have a new bartender here. Get me?"

"I've heard of you, Mister Halliday," husked the fat bartender. "I ain't got no authority to tell you you can set up in here, but the boss didn't say I couldn't introduce even the devil if he came in and offered to buy drinks for the crowd."

The bartender turned and called in a loud voice: "Everybody belly up and drink with Mister Flash Halliday!"

A dozen men turned eyes and inspected Halliday. Halliday stood, tall, straight, handsome, sinister. Some men jumped up and ran eagerly to the bar. A few were slower. One hesitated noticeably. Halliday looked at him with the hard glittering eyes of a rattlesnake; the eyes of a willing killer. The man arose and walked slowly to the bar.

"I'll take a short beer," he muttered.

"Give that man a bottle of champagne!" said Halliday.

The man looked at Flash, stepping back from the bar to get a clear view. He sized up the tall, lithe gambler and made no mistake in his estimate. Tim MacDougal was of dour, canny Scotch blood. His hardy courage and good judgment had won him the foremanship of the Bagpipe spread. He noted that the gambler did not show a holstered gun, his long Prince Albert was buttoned from the flowing bow of his tie to his slender waist. His silk hat sat squarely on his head.

Tim had heard the bartender announce the man's name. Tim had a good memory. Someone had told him that a gambler of that name was a fancy trick-gun man. He, too, had heard the story that trick-gun men were all yellow. Tim prided himself on being a good judge of character. He decided that if the man he was judging was yellow, it was a dangerous shade of that treacherous color. The fellow was cold, keen, cunning, bad, domineering. He'd never be popular anywhere.

Tim MacDougal knew another trick-gun

man and did not believe the popular opinion; few about Burma did.

"Men packed guns and knives to fight with," Tim argued to himself. "Everybody practised the fast draw so, if possible, they might have a bit of advantage over another gun-toter. Most men tied the triggers of their single-actions back and used the finger-draw, flip-cocked if they could, slipped the hammer or fanned, as best they could, at need. All this was trick-stuff, of a sort. If a man was ingenious enough, dexterous enough, to beat the regular stuff —it was up to him, not a matter of courage but of *sabe* and skill."

Tim MacDougal's courage was of the stubborn, dogged variety, not thin skinned. If his judgment told him he was beat before the draw, he did not call, out of foolhardy curiosity. He used his head. However he would not be forced to drink with any man or to drink what another ordered him to drink. Tim walked toward the gambler, but without making any movement that might, even by chance, be mistaken for intention to draw. Flash Halliday watched the cattleman approach; he rubbed his white, slender hands together as he did so.

Close to the gambler, Tim MacDougal stopped and shot a steady look into the gambler's bright, black eyes. "Muster," he said, "I'm nae so keen aboot drinking wi' strangers ut onny time. One thing I wonna do at the command o' Goud, man or the diel; that is to swill the giggle water o' the sporting women. I will drink beer or whuskey wi' ye or nawthing."

Flash Halliday threw back his head and laughed. "Man," he said, "you have me all wrong. I liked your looks the instant I clapped eyes on you. I recognized you as a man of importance. I thought to do you special honor by ordering expensive wine for you. Drink what you like, even water if it suits you best."

The gambler's words, themselves, were placating, but his manner of speaking them made them a sneer. Should anyone repeat them, no fault could be found with their meaning. Should Tim return to the bar and drink the tipple of his own choice, the gambler's face was saved. Should Tim take further offense, should he assume the aggressive, a witness, should there be a killing, would have to admit, even though reluctant to do so, that Tim MacDougal had brought the trouble upon himself. What a person actually says, counts, in even a miners' court, not the manner of the saying.

Tim MacDougal was, as has been said, of canny Scottish blood. He recognized the

A Scotchman Refuses A Drink

gambler's words and manner as a trick. A trick of a cunning trick-gun man. He looked coldly at the gambler.

"Ye'rrre slick," he said, in an even tone, "too slick for Tim MacDougal. But mark my words, Muster, there's your better, even in this small town."

Tim moved on, and without turning his head walked out of the saloon and into the darkness of the early evening. Outside he did not pause, he crossed the dusty street and stepped up onto the board walk. Three stores down, he entered The Emporium. At one side of the wide, long room there were tall, glass-fronted cases set against the wall. Inside the cases were rows of leaning guns; old ones, new ones, rifles, carbines and shot guns; their makes and models dated from that every year to a day when muzzle-loaders held sway.

Over the low counter showcase leaned a young man. He was rather short and heavy set. His face was round, smooth, boyish. His hair was short, thin, and of a weak

brown shade. His nose was short, small, well-formed. His chin was broadly rounded, his mouth a generous Cupid's bow. His blue eyes sparkled laughingly beneath pale eyebrows. He was evidently joking with a large, flashily dressed man who stood outside the counter, one huge, white paw resting on the showcase, the thumb of the other hooked in the armhole of his ornate silk vest, fingers spread displaying gold rings set with large but off-color diamonds.

Tim MacDougal approached the joking pair and spoke gruffly. "Ye two mon best enjoy your jokes while ye may. I will wait obleegingly. What I have to say, when ye are ready for ut, may not sound sae funny in ye're lugs."

The young man laughed in easy good-nature. "Tim," he gurgled, "it always seems to me that Scotch brogue of yours has been a long way and a long time from home. It always seems improved after a pint or two of Haig and Haig. What's on your mind?"

Tim dug a burly thumb into the big man's vest front. "While ye've been loitering here with the Dickey boy, a bold, bad man has taken possession of your honkey-tonk. His name, he says, is Flash Halliday. He ordered drinks for your bar-flies. I didna like the mon, so I compromised with my disposition and ordered beer. He told your fat grub o' a bartender to gie' me champagne. We dinna agree on the giggle water so I came away."

The man laughed uproariously. "Lordy!" he cried, slapping MacDougal on the shoulder with an enormous paw. "For a second you had me going, Mac. I'm glad somebody's blowing his jack at my bar. It's a mortal cinch I'd never get rich from your treating the bunch."

MacDougal growled, "Ye're recht aboot that, Sport Mullin, and I misdoot ye'll ever get rich from your cut of the stud game the diel is setting up in your shebang."

Sport Mullin's thumb came out of his arm-pit. Dick Jackson leaned farther over the counter, his Cupid's bow mouth half open, his bright blue eyes boring into MacDougal's. Sport Mullin bent down and also looked into Tim's eyes, startled, questioning.

"You mean to tell me, Mac," said Sport, "that some strange hombre proposes to set up a lay-out in my joint without asking me?"

"I do!" replied Tim. "I heard him tell that magot behind your bar he expected the dray wi' his table, ony minute. I gathered he dinna ontend to await either your pleasure or that o' young Dickey boy."

"I'll go over and throw him out!" yelled Sport. "Why the guts of the cuss—going into *my* place and—"

"Cut ut!" snapped MacDougal. "Dinna ye hear me say the feller is Flash Halliday?"

"And what if you did! They all look alike to Sport Mullin. I break 'em into pieces with my hands."

MacDougal scoffed. "And what would the notorious Flash Halliday, the trickiest gunman in all the wide West, be doin' while ye were breaking him wi' your hands? Had he been sae easily broke, think ye Tim MacDougal would hae come bearin' tales to you and the Dickey boy?"

Dick Jackson was not laughing now, but a smile still flickered at the corners of his mouth and his bright blue eyes were gleaming like blue diamonds of the first water. He reached far over the counter and caught Sport Mullin's coat lapel.

"Listen, Sport, this Flash Halliday isn't in your line. He's got a great name for trick gun stuff, but I doubt if he knows it all."

Dick Jackson shot a glance at Tim. "Answer some questions for me, Mac, and try and remember all you can. What did you do when the gambler ordered wine for you?"

"I stepped back from the bar and walked toward him."

"What did he do?"

"He stood back, too, and stood grinnin' at me like the diel himself might grin."

"Is he packing a six-shooter?"

"I couldn't be sartin. He wears a Prince Albert, buttoned to his chin, and a plug hat upon his slick head."

"But his hands? How did he hold his hands, Mac?"

"Like a domned Jew peddler when he's trying to sell you silk suspenders; rubbing them together."

Young Dick Jackson straightened back from the counter and grinned with delight. "I thought that would be it," he said.

"What would be it?" Tim questioned.

"Never mind," replied Dick. "You fellers go over to the door and wait for me. I'll be along in a minute. Then we'll go over and call on Flash Halliday. I've always wanted to meet the gent."

At the open doorway, Sport Mullin grumbled to MacDougal: "I've hear it said that 'it takes a thief to catch a thief', I reckon it takes a trick gun man to get a trick gun man, huh, Mac?"

MacDougal gloomed, "I hope the Dickey Boy is no over-confident. He's only a lad, eighteen, his ould mon says. The gambler is near forty and as cunning as a fox."

"Dick's played with guns since his old man gave him a hog-leg to cut his teeth on," said Sport Mullin. "He's the best gunsmith this side of Big Muddy. His shop is filled with contraptions no sane man could ever figure out."

"But he's not a killer," demurred MacDougal. "The gambler is a cold-blooded murderer if I ever saw one. He puts an enemy in the wrong and then kills him, I suppose."

Back in his gun shop, Dick Jackson had peeled his coat, an ordinary sack coat of the day. From a drawer he took some gleaming instruments, turned his back to the open doorway of the store room for several minutes. Then quickly, he replaced his coat, buttoned it tight, and came smiling to the street door.

Tim MacDougal sighed, but followed Sport and Dick across the street. There was a place he had reserved for tables at which his customers could sit and drink. Sport saw that the tables had been piled in a corner. In their place was a long, curved, narrow table. On its inner side a shallow bite had been cut out. In a chair in this bite sat Flash Halliday. He was speaking. Sport listened.

"Gents!" said Flash, smiling and waving white hands to include all in the room. "Gents! At last you are to have a square stud game in this town, one in which the sky is the limit. A light rake-off for the house, so small you will not mind," he paused, "a square game, a fair game."

Sport Mullin stepped to the bar. The bartender quailed, but Sport only inquired: "Who's the new gal? It seems we've got us a new gambling man and a new sporting lady, all while I was out for less than an hour."

The bartender screwed up his nerve and leaned 'way over the bar and whispered: "I ain't no great shakes with a gun, boss. I told you that. That coot horned in—I reckon Tim MacDougal put you wise. As for the gal, never saw her before. I reckon your woman can tell you about her."

"I don't reckon we can use 'em, Dick," he said to young Dick Jackson who had edged up to the bar and stood listening.

"No," said Dick, "pappy told me to keep all such outfits out of town. I guess I better start this one out before it gets to going any farther." Without waiting for a confirmation, Dick sauntered over to the layout.

"Your name Halliday?" he inquired of the gambler.

Flash looked up and smiled at the lad. "Right the first time, sonny." Then he frowned slightly and continued, "Aren't you pretty young to be in a place like

this?" He pointed to a large card on the wall. It read:

NO MINORS ALLOWED

Dick smiled back at Flash, "I'm Dick Jackson," he said. "I put that sign up there myself at pappy's orders. It means that kids are to keep out."

"So you're boss Jackson's kid," said Flash. "Well all kids look alike to me, so run along, sonny. I reckon your mother wants you." Flash Halliday was again moving one hand around the other. He looked into Dick's bright blue eyes with his bright black ones and continued: "You should go to bed early, kid, to have good nerves. I suggest you go to bed *now*, get up with the dickey birds and practice shooting them with a ten gage shot gun. Somebody down at Carsonville told me some boy up here was getting to be quite good—with a shot gun."

Dick Jackson quit smiling. His elbows were by his side, his forearms extended, his hands as far apart as the width of his body, not even a ring on a finger.

"Flash," said Dick, "you've picked the wrong town. It's your move—how do you want to go, walking, straight up, or feet first?"

"Who," said Flash, easily, "would make me go either way?"

"I," said Dick.

"You and who else?"

"Nobody else. If you can get me, Halliday, you can run this town to suit yourself."

"That goes, stranger," said Sport Mullin. "Dick runs this town, now; if you're a better man, you can run it."

Flash Halliday was puzzled. He thought he knew every gun trick on earth. He believed that Derringers in clip-holsters on his arm, concealed by his large and long coat sleeves, the best trick of all. With his hands close together he could insert a hand into the opposite sleeve and draw and fire one or two guns in a quarter second. No man could go for, draw, cock, point and fire a six-shooter in such a short time. He believed that positively. He, himself, couldn't do it, and he was as swift a mover as any man he'd ever seen.

Dick Jackson stood squarely in front of him, he couldn't be missed. Dick's hands were empty and far apart; his coat was buttoned up. He was not wearing a hat in which a pistol might have been concealed. Flash looked at Dick's coat pockets, they did not bulge or sag from the weight of a gun. Flash Halliday was a gambler, he'd witnessed men bluff. He decided that young Dick Jackson was a prince of a bluffer, but still a bluffer. He decided to call.

Flash Halliday's white hands suddenly slipped by one another and into opposite coat sleeves. His movements were as fast as those of a sleight-of-hand artist. His white fingers had grasped the butts of his concealed Derringers. His eyes were glued on Dick Jackson's belly. They caught a gleam of something. He felt a bullet crash into his own belly. Then another. Flash Halliday's Derringers dropped out of his coat sleeves. He looked at Dick Jackson, staring. Then his thin lips twitched with an admiring smile.

"You're right, kid. I came to the wrong town. Those sleeve guns of yours have mine beat a mile. Wyatt Earp told Marshal Henderson, 'All trick-gunners are yellow.' Earp's a damn liar! You've proved that, kid." The fire went out of his eyes. He tried to rekindle it. "So—long—kid—" he managed a sneering smile—"see you—in hell."

"Gun-fechter be gun-fechters!" said Tim MacDougal to Sport Mullin. "It makes nae deefrunce whether they use canons or sleeve guns."

"I like my hands better," grunted Sport.

"A bit o' cald steel—" Tim began.

"Shut up!" barked Young Dick, "you make me shudder."

CAVALIER TO COWBOY

by DICK HALLIDAY

An Informative Article Showing The Evolution Of The Cowboy And His Dress From The Earliest Spanish Cavaliers

"Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
Rich—but yet not gaudy,
For the apparel oft proclaims the man."
—Shakespeare.

The *Calzoneras* of Don Augustine.

A beautiful pair of trousers. Black broadcloth, foxed front and back with dark green cloth. Trimmed with gleaming gold braid. From hip to ankle, a double row of golden buttons and little chains running down the outside seam on each leg. In all the Californias no *caballero* had ever owned a finer pair. Tailored in the City of Mexico, shipped to California for Don Augustine de Ortega to wear on his wedding day. They were laying on the embroidered satin bedspread when 'Juanito, the Indian *mozo* from the Mission, stole softly into the room.

'Juanito had no business to be there but all Santa Barbara was gossiping about those wonderful *calzoneras* and he wanted to see them. So, knowing that the household would all be away at a *merienda* excepting Tia Maria, the fat old cook, he had crept across the *patio*, tip-toed into the Don's room. His beady eyes lit up covetously as he spied the bright gold braid shining against the smooth, glossy black and green cloth. For a garment like this to wear in the present, 'Juanito would cheerfully risk all the future terrors of that flaming, fiery Hell about which Father Felipe thundered every Sunday until the blood of his hearers curdled in their veins.

EARLY SPANISH RANCHERO

This extremely unique picture was taken at Santa Cruz, California, in 1872. The whole outfit was hand embroidered and took months to finish.

Curiosity to see those costly trousers had lured 'Juanito down from the Mission. He only intended to steal into the *casa* Ortega and take a peep at them. The empty house emboldened him. He went up to the bed, stroked the smooth cloth, ran his fingers down the glittering braids, held them up against his own drill-clad legs. Then Satan tempted him,

Why should he not take them for his own? Don Augustine was a *rico*. What was a pair of *calzoneras*—even if they had cost a thousand dollars—to him? On quick impulse, the *mozo* rolled them up, thrust them into his cotton blouse and furtively stole from the room. His steps hastened as he heard the sound of singing voices, the muffled thud of hoofs coming towards the house. The family were returning from the *merienda*. In sudden terror 'Juanito fled. His heels twinkled across the *patio*, scuffed through the dust of the roadway, mad headlong pace never slackening until he had dived into the little room opening off the Mission corridor where his master, Father Felipe, slept.

Escorted by singing, laughing *caballeros*, each one with a pretty girl sitting in the saddle in front of him, the ox-drawn *carreta* lumbered into the *patio*, the Doña Augustina and her friends clambered out and entered the house. Suddenly a piercing shriek cut through the babble of gay voices. Another shriek! The men swung the girls to the ground, slid from their horses' rumps and rushed into the *casa*.

Shrieks and exclamations brought them crowding to the room in which the Doña was wringing her hands in frantic dismay.

"The *calzoneras*," she wailed. "They are gone—stolen!"

When, finally, the *caballeros* understood the matter they were bewildered. Stolen! Impossible! No thief had ever been known in Santa Barbara. But the Doña would not be consoled.

"Stolen," she wept, "and the wedding only two days away."

"But, *mamacita*," pleaded the young Don Augustine, "it cannot be—we have no thieves."

"I left them here," shrieked his mother wildly, "now they are gone. Stolen! Find the thief or no wedding for you."

"Search the house," Captain de la Guerra, commandant of the Presidio garrison, pushed to the front and took charge. "Some of you look outside for tracks."

A call from outside brought them clattering out. "See," the Barbareño gestured to the mark of bare feet, imprinted on the dusty road. "See—it must be the thief."

Slipping into their saddles they tore up the road, eyebrows arching in surprise as they saw those tracks pointing straight for the Mission. Across the open ground, up to the building, following the foot prints until they reined up at the flagstone corridor. There, before their eyes, the mark of dusty feet crossed the stone flags and ended in front of a door.

The Captain swung from saddle to flagstones, jerked the door open, his rapier flashing from its scabbard as he sprang inside, the rest crowding after him. Only to recoil before the unexpected presence of Father Felipe, who, helped by 'Juanito, was changing his cassock.

"How now," ejaculated the priest, incensed at this intrusion on his privacy. "What mean you, my sons?" But 'Juanito, quaking in terror, shrunk against the wall, he knew what the *caballeros* were after.

"Pardon, Father," stammered the Captain, "but we have followed a thief here."

"A thief!" The hot-tempered priest exploded. But, as apologies and explanations were made he cooled down. Of a surety the missing *calzoneras* were not in his room. But those tracks? Nonplussed the Captain glanced over the little room. He eyed the rawhide trunks, the open cupboard, the pallet—ah, what was that? A gleam of gold peeping out at the end.

"Pardon, Father—what is this?"

He jerked the coverlet back, there, on the blanket underneath, were the stolen trousers.

Father Felipe's eyes widened in horror, his face crimsoned in wrath, then, as the unhappy 'Juanito fell on his knees, gibbering in fright, sudden comprehension dawned on his mind.

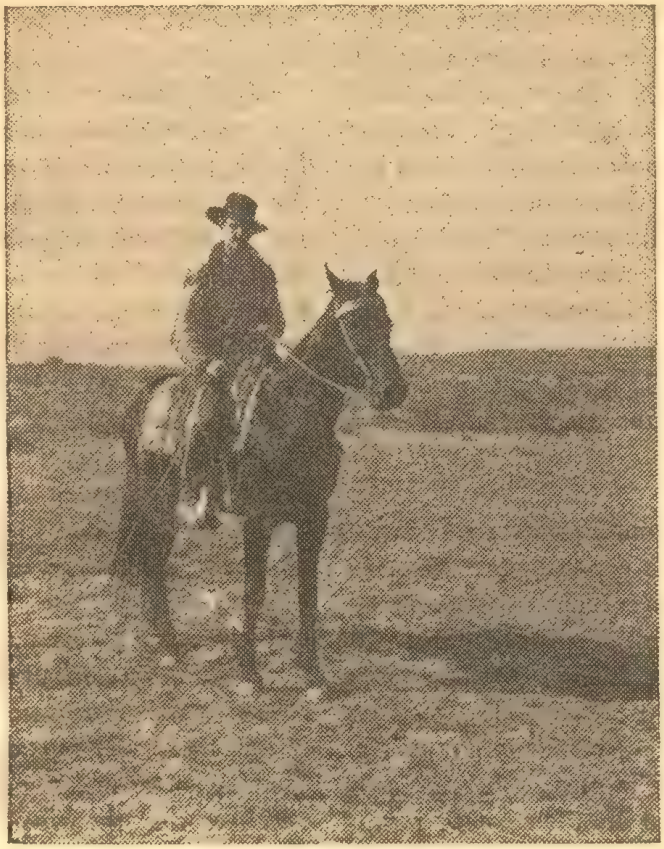
"Ha," he breathed softly. "Ha—is it

thou who hast sold thy immortal soul to the devil. Then hidden the price in the bed of a priest of the Holy Church. Thou needest absolution—and unction — my son. *Caporal*—hither!" he bellowed.

The corporal of the Mission *escolta* clanked into the room, the priest gestured to the frightened *mozo*.

"Twenty-five lashes on the bare belly," he ordered. "Lay them on well."

The corporal dragged the wailing Indian away, the *padre* turned to Don Augustine, "Thou, my son, take thy *calzoneras* and bestow them safely till thy wedding day. A thousand dollars is as naught but 'tis far to a tailor who can make thee another pair."



COVERED WAGON DAYS

This cowboy roamed the plains in the covered wagon days. He wore the flat hat of the period and fringed buckskin shirt. His pants were homespun jeans and they were worn in flat-heeled cowhide boots. The broad browband on the horse's bridle was used to blind bad ones.

THE DRESS OF THE CAVALIER

"What? A thousand dollars for a pair of trousers," gasps the amazed reader. "Impossible! How would they get that way?"

Quite possible. In the first place it was "The Splendid Forties," the Golden Age of California. The Spanish Dons owned feudal *ranchos* of immense size. Horses and cattle were numbered in countless thousands. The Boston hide-carrying ships had brought wealth to the California cow country.

Also it was an equestrian age. Always, in all countries, from the dim past to the present day, military and civilian horsemen have been gaily dressed and equipped for bold adventure and deeds of derring-do. The riders of Asia dressed in silks and chain mail. In Europe, knights wore armor of heavy plate, inlaid with gold and silver, ivory and pearl. When gunpowder made armor useless it was replaced by the picturesque attire of the cavalier. With wealth and leisure at command, aristocratic traditions behind them, is it any wonder that the Dons of California evolved a splendor of dress and equipment which so well suited the Lotos land they lived in?

When California was first colonized the day of full armor had passed. The Conquistadores of the sixteenth century had a plumed steel helmet, steel cuirass and back-piece, with hinged steel greaves covering the upper thighs. Long jack boots, with the tops coming well over the knees, were worn. Horses carried a steel frontlet, protecting the face, hinged steel greaves

guarded their necks. Bridles were of colored leather with wide, scalloped reins, the deep war-saddle gay with embroidered saddle cloth and trappings of red, black or blue leather.

But this was too cumbersome and soon discarded for lighter equipment better suited to the needs of a frontier country where the saddle horse was the only means of travel. The steel helmet was replaced by a low-crowned, broad brim felt hat with a gold, silver or silken band round the crown. A silk neck-handkerchief—*pano del sol*—round the neck, short *bolero* jacket of cloth or velvet, with scarlet facings and trimmings, worn above a sash of silk, linen or cotton. Wide breeches, coming just below the knee, open part of their length to show white linen under-trousers and ending in soft deerskin riding leggings, worn very loosely and tied below the knee, were adopted by soldiers and *rancheros* alike.

Not until cattle ranching was well started was any distinctive fashion of dress and saddlery designed. The low crowned hat remained in favor and a handkerchief was worn round the head, Spanish style, to protect the hat from sweat and oil that the dandies used in their hair. The short, jaunty *bolero* jacket, trimmed with colored cloth, became universal. The sash was retained, a leather *tirador*—a broad belt with a rounded drop over the thighs to protect the clothes from chafing by the *riata*—added. Short breeches remained in favor and decorated with buttons of silver or copper. The loose riding legging became standardized. This California dress was the first forerunner of the modern cowboy styles worn all over the West today.

The high front of the military saddle became a big, rounded pommel to "dally" the *riata* to. Leather was scarce, rawhide plentiful, so the old Moorish custom of braiding bridles, reins, *riatas*, hackamores and quirts from thin strips of rawhide was revived. Practice made the workers expert and their products were so artistic that the work of the California *riateros* became famous all over the West. Saddles were carved, decorated with filigree work but no silver was used to ornament them and all bits and spurs were plain iron.

Not until 1800 did the art of silver mounting riding equipment come to California. But that time the first clumsy cowboy saddle with its big pommel had been discarded for a better type with a broad, flat top horn, with a center fire rigging and the stirrup leathers hung well forward. Rawhide braiding became elaborate and costly. The Missions taught Indian converts to make saddle trees, tan and carve leather and instructed *plateros* —silversmiths—how to force and silver mount bits and spurs and make conchos and saddle ornaments. The *conquistadore* had become a *caballero* and his men-at-arms were *vaqueros*—cowboys.

After 1830 the dress of the men changed. *Calzoneras*—long trousers—replaced the knee breeches. At first they were cut in one whole piece of cloth with, literally, hundreds of silver buttons to fasten them and required the help of a servant to put on. This was inconvenient so the pattern was changed to pantaloons with the outside seam left open from waist to ankle. The upper edge of the seam carried buttonholes worked in silk, the lower seam rimmed with eyelet holes to fit the shanks of silver or gold buttons.

These *calzoneras* soon became elaborate and expensive. They were a marvel of fine needlework, gold and silver ornamentation. For protection when riding after cattle, *armas de pelo* were used. These were two flaps of goatskin, tanned with the hair on, tied, one on each side, to the saddle fork. When mounted each flap came over the front of the wearer's legs, protecting the trousers from brush, dirt and weather. Later on the *armas*, sewn to the leather *tirador* belt became the present day *chapereios* or "chaps."

For town and pleasure use the "chaps" were replaced with a riding apron of deerskin, tied round the waist, fastened under the leg at the knees with small thongs. These protected the trousers when riding or roping and were also worn during hot weather spells. They were called *armitas* and are still in use today. In addition, all men wore the deerskin riding leggings known as *gamuzas*. Custom decreed that these should be worn loosely, fitting snugly only at the knees where they were tied by garters made of braided silk.

Originally this dress was first developed in the Far East among the nomadic Tartars who lived on horseback. The Moors copied it, altered and added details to suit their own needs and took it to Spain when they conquered that country centuries ago. It was the national Spanish dress before the Dons brought it to California. Designed especially for riding, it was so practical that many of its features survive today in the informal sports clothes worn by town men and in the present day cowboy dress.

"PECOS"

This picture was taken on the verandah of the old Chisholm ranch and shows the dandified Texas cowboy of the '70's. He is carrying a cap and ball Remington pistol and his outfit is typical of the time. Even his hat brim is braided with gold.

Up to the 'Forties, very few *gringos* were allowed to settle in California. Those who did promptly adopted the gorgeous dress of the Californios—did so because it was better suited to the outdoor, horseback life of California than the more formal American clothes.

When the *"barbaros del norte"* came in force and with military pomp and ceremony annexed California to the Union, they were so much struck with the beauty of the dashing *señoritas* and the picturesque dress of the men that they capitulated to the former and then arrayed themselves in the finest habiliments of the latter that their money could buy.

Even Colonel Frémont—whom history calls "The Pathfinder"—could not resist the temptation. After concluding the Treaty of Cahuenga and marching down to Los Angeles, about the first thing he did was to interview a Mexican tailor. The finished result was gorgeous in the extreme. Instead of the blue and gold of an army officer, the Colonel sported a red *vicuña* hat, decorated with gold braid, black velvet

bolero jacket, sash of scarlet silk, trousers of red, green and gold, trimmed with purple velvet, with silver bell buttons down each seam. Under these he wore white linen under trousers with pleated bottoms, three feet in width.

For a few years after the annexation, the southern part of the state, especially around Los Angeles, was so prosperous that extravagance in dress and living bordered on the unbelievable. Several years of plentiful rains and grass had resulted in horses and cattle increasing in hundreds of thousands. The gold miners of the north needed beef and prices of livestock soared. It was a common thing for a *ranchero* to sell a thousand head of cattle at from twenty to thirty dollars a head, then use the price to pay for a new saddle, a suit of clothes or a stake at *monte*. Hexagonal slugs of gold, valued at fifty dollars each, were in common use. Small change was almost unknown.

When, in 1853, organized banditry terrified the lower half of the state, two companies of state rangers were formed. The Los Angeles company, under Captain Hope, chose a dress uniform gay enough for any son of Mars. A red or yellow *vicuña* hat, as the fancy of the wearer dictated, lavishly trimmed with gold, dark blue *bolero* jacket, glittering with gold embroidery, red silk sash, gold striped *calzoneras* and two Colt Navy revolvers, holstered in patent leather, silver mounted scabbards, made up a uniform which made the Rangers the envy of all who did not belong to them.

They dressed like dandies, rode like centaurs, fought like devils. Desperados, Mexican outlaws, horse and cattle thieves, border ruffians, Indians, all were mercilessly trailed down, hanged or killed. They bought their own uniforms, donated their services to the community without pay. They rid Southern California of the criminal element who infested it. Spanish Dons, *gringo* doctors, lawyers, business men and ranchmen, rode stirrup to stirrup in their ranks. Raiding, robberies and murders were of daily occurrence when they organized. When they disbanded their work was done. The cow counties were tamed.

Spanish dress in California persisted up to the Civil War. Gradually it was replaced with the less elaborate dress of the American buckaroo. But the buckaroo—being a horseman—was also a dandy. He adopted the low crowned, broad brim hat, wore a fancy vest, gauntlet gloves, striped pants and riding boots. A silk handkerchief was round his neck, frilled elastic "garters" decorated with bows of ribbon, held up his shirt sleeves. Blue denim overalls were taboo—they were only for miners, sheep herders and farmers.

Chaps made of Angora goatskin—black—white—red—yellow—protected his legs. In summer he used buckskin *armitas*. On the Pacific Slope ranges, silver mounted spurs, bits, bridles and flower carved saddles were a social necessity.

On one company ranch in Nevada, the dress and horse equipment of the buckaroos was so expensive that it attracted the notice of the superintendent. He figured out that carved saddles, silver mounted bridles, "California pants," foxed with buckskin at twenty-five dollars a pair, could not be bought on a ranch hand's pay. Investigation revealed that the buckaroos were rustling on a wholesale scale, selling calves and young cows to get the money to buy their fancy riggings.

THE COWBOY OF TEXAS AND MONTANA

Roughly speaking, the Sierra mountain chain divides the rangeland in two parts. "West of the Slope" marks California, Nevada, Eastern Oregon. "East of the Slope" lays the north and southwest cattle country.

The cowboy of California started with traditions and preserved them. *Americanos*

began to drift into Texas about 1820, went into the stock business, copying the dress and methods of their Mexican neighbors. But the fight for independence against Mexico ended in a bitterness of feeling which caused everything Mexican, good or bad, to be discarded. But even the Texas cowboy could not escape the influence of the Spanish *caballero* on his dress and horse equipment.

The first American overlanders to Texas were descendants of the cavalier families of the South. They took naturally to a horseman's life. When the trail-driving days started, the Texas cowboy had been fashioned, by the riding, fighting environment of a raw, rough land, into a frontier cavalier. As such he takes rank with the knights and cavaliers of all ages.

COLONEL IDAHO BILL PEARSON

This picture shows the type of dress affected by old time scouts and Indian fighters after they turned rancher. That coat was a work of art and was said to have cost more than $150.00. This outfit was typical of the Northwest country.

It was not long before he developed a "cavalier complex" of his own. In dress and bridle gear he followed the semi-military fashion of the South rather than the range designed style of the Spanish and the Mexican *haciendaderos*. The Spanish style he never knew, the Mexican he despised.

Old Colonel Lamar once spun me a yarn his grandfather had told him. How the young bloods of the Texas republic were so particular about the fit of their buckskin breeches that they had the tailor to sew them on their legs whilst the buckskin was damp. Then, when the leather dried, they had a skin tight fit.

"Grandad," chuckled the old colonel, "once broke his arm, 'count of that. He started to mount a tall, fidgety blooded colt, wearing a pair of new, tight breeches. Couldn't swing his leg over the saddle quick enough, got thrown, lit on his left arm and broke it."

In the trail-driving days, Texas cowboys drifted all over the northwest and seem to have been noted for the money they would pay for a beaver hat, handmade boots or an ivory or pearl handled Colt. In Arizona, more than one Texas rider was ambushed by the Apaches solely to get the fancy Colt he was carrying.

Range work in Texas and parts of the northwest evolved a different kind of saddlery and dress to that used on the Pacific Slope. Open range branding of wild cattle made a heavy, double rigged saddle necessary. Prickly pear and chaparral scraped the hair off Angora chaps so they were replaced with the "apron batwings" of heavy leather. The batwings proved uncomfortable on the windy, northern ranges so they made way for the "shotgun chaps," so called because sewing the outside seam together all the way down the leg made them look like

twin barrels of a shotgun, with a choke at the muzzle.

Range fashions seem picturesque to those who do not live in the West. But nothing cowboys wear or use is designed for ornament or worn from vanity purely. It is the universal urge of all mankind for adornment that leads to carved saddles, silver mounted spurs, bridle gear and saddle ornaments.

Even the rough and ready Texas cowboy was not above arraying himself like a lily of the fields. In 1872, a rider turned up at Chisholm's ranch at Bosque Grande, New Mexico, whose dress and saddlery would have suited the most particular and dandified cavalier. His horse was a milk-white stallion, rigged with a black leather San Marcial silver mounted saddle. He had a small, gold trimmed Mexican sombrero, a close fitting buckskin shirt with shield front and fringed sleeves. Trousers of buckskin were fringed and his boots stilted on three inch heels.

An itinerant photographer was at the ranch and took a picture of him. All that is remembered of that cowboy today is that he was a good hand—a dead shot—which he proved by shooting a gambler in Roswell. He gave his name as "Pecos" and his destination as somewhere in Montana. The original photograph taken of him is printed with this story, and proves, without a single doubt, that the Texas cowboy was as much a cavalier as any Don.

Butch Cassidy, cowboy leader of the "Wild Bunch" of train and bank robbers, never used fancy gear or clothes. But he was very fastidious about his hats, boots and gloves. His men liked fine outfits and celebrated every successful haul they made by buying new saddlery and fine clothes. But shopping for the Wild Bunch often presented difficulties.

An old time tailor, located in a certain Montana town, made a specialty of supplying these men with California pants, foxed with buckskin, at thirty dollars a pair. But he would not send them away by mail or express. His customers had to call for them.

Harvey Logan—better known as Kid Curry—once rode into that town to get his new pants and a Stetson beaver for Butch Cassidy. The pants were ready, the new beaver was doubled up a bit to pack easily behind the cantle and the pants tied up with it. Then Harvey dropped in to a saloon to get a drink. A deputy-sheriff there recognized him and went for his gun. When the smoke cleared the deputy was dead, the bartender dying and two men badly wounded. Another deputy, hearing the shooting, blocked the doorway as Harvey was rushing out.

The outlaw hurled his empty gun full in the officer's face, knocking him down, jumped over his body, raced to the hitching-rack, forked his horse and bolted out of town under a hail of lead fired by excited citizens and reward hunters. When he got to camp it was found that several bullets had passed through the rolled up pants and hat, sieving them in so many places that neither could be used. The gun thrown at the deputy was picked up by the latter, given by him to his brother, who, a few years ago, gave it to me. A Colt Frontier model, short barrel and .32-20 caliber.

In the open range days, when Texas longhorns were trailing up to Montana, many cowboys were so particular about their hats that Stetson finally supplied a very light beaver felt, so fine it could be rolled up, so costly that only a cowboy would buy it. At that time, many a puncher would spend for two to six months' wages on his hat and the gold or silver band worn round it.

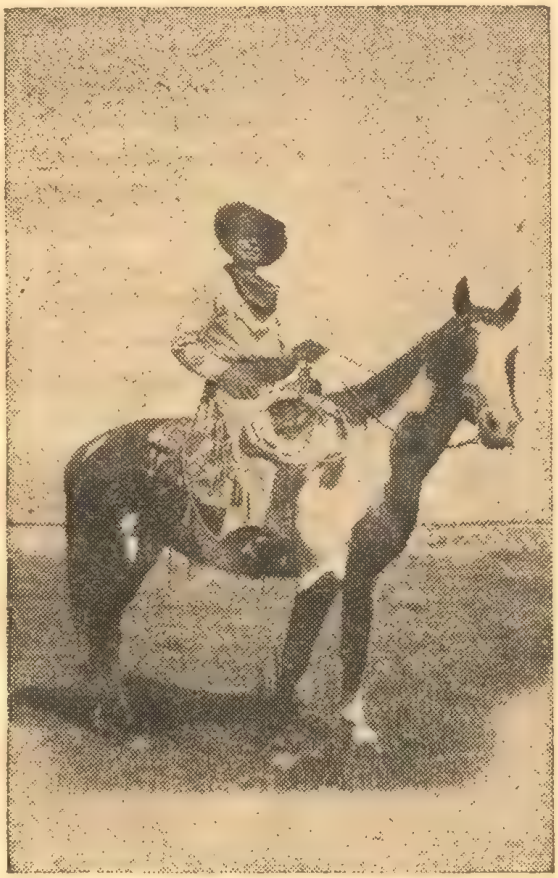
Bat Masterson had one of these hats. Also he had a gold band, fashioned into the likeness of a rattlesnake, with ruby eyes and fangs, round the crown. That band was made in the City of Mexico, smuggled

into the United States and set Bat back the price of fifty beef steers.

Amongst the men who started ranches in the northwest were a few of the old Indian fighters and scouts. They had a fancy for flamboyant buckskin coats and vests and the flashiest "cow-dog" that ever came up the trail could not hold a candle to some of these old-timers. They affected pure white Stetsons and pleated linen shirts. Vests of buckskin, heavily embroidered in colored silks, made in St. Louis and costing from fifty to seventy-five dollars each.

Sometimes their coats were finished by Indian squaws but mostly the coats went "up the river" to the settlements to have colored silk flowers embroidered all over the fronts and backs. How much a job like this would cost I never could find out but Buffalo Bill paid a hundred and twenty-five dollars for embroidery work on a coat he had made in his scouting days long before he ever dreamed of his Wild West show. These coats were most elaborate, decorated with colored quills, bead work, fur and triple rows of fringe beside the embroidery.

A collector showed me the trousers, guns and belt owned by "Steel" McQuade—said to have been one of Quantrell's guerrillas—when he was ranching in Montana. The trousers were of fine black broadcloth, foxed with buckskin in the usual way but with diamond shaped pieces sewn on the front of the knees, a buckskin stripe ran down the outside seams and the bottoms were rimmed with scalloped buckskin to prevent wear against the stirrups and saddle fenders. And, except on the seat and inside of the legs, all this buckskin was a mass of colored silk embroidery.



MODERN TEXAS CAVALIER

Jeff Vaughn, Ex-sheriff and ranger from Marfa, Texas. It is supposed that Jeff was Zane Grey's model for the hero of the book "The Last of the Duanes."

The gun-belt had a gold buckle, the loops were sewn with silver wire and the two guns—converted cap-and-ball Colts — were inlaid with silver in floral patterns and the ebony handles had rattlesnake heads inlaid in silver on the outside plates. If the rest of "Steel's" outfit matched up with his pants and guns he could have ridden in the company of any *caballero* that ever buckled spurs.

An examination of the catalogs issued by Western outfitting firms should be proof enough that the cowboy of today—quite apart from professional rodeo riders and dude wranglers—is not so very far behind his predecessors in expensive, picturesque dress and outfits.

There are more carved and silver mounted saddles in the West today than there ever were before. Many southwestern cattlemen own saddles which cost more than an expensive home. If a rider cannot afford the price of sterling silver the saddlery

firms will supply him with white nickel silver, really better than sterling, as it stands the hard use of range life better.

As plain matter of fact, the American cowman has beaten the Spanish Don at his own game. American saddle-makers can—and do—turn out better, more elaborately carved saddles than any Spaniard ever saw. American silversmiths today make the very finest silver mounted bits, spurs, bridles and saddles that the world has ever seen. Seven hundred and fifty dollars, up to anything you like to pay, is the usual price of a silver mounted, hand carved saddle. Five hundred dollars for a bridle and martingale is quite commonplace. Spurs run from fifteen up to two hundred and fifty dollars a pair—not including the silver mounted leathers.

Of course, in rough, brushy ranges, fancy outfits are not generally used. But even in those countries I have seen modern cowboys cover the fronts of their expensive saddles with damp rawhide, laced on the saddle, then go about their work. And I know one top-hand in Arizona who usually pays two hundred dollars for a saddle, uses it "as is," wears it out in less than eighteen months, then buys another.

"Dad" Passons, of Ventura, a veteran *amansador,* who claims sixty years in the saddle as a horse-breaker, is today using the saddle which belonged to his father. Dad still rides 'em just as they come, no one ever "tops off" a colt for him. And when Dad rides out on some snorty, rolling-eyed four-year-old his outfit glitters like the front show window of a jeweller's shop.

Conquistadore — caballero — ranchero — vaquero — cowboy. So runs the saga of the West. Those five words cover all the storied romance of the men on horseback who wove into the drab warp-and-woof of our commercial development the scarlet and gold threads of adventure, the purple and blue of the mountains and the emerald and russet glories of the plains. They did their work well. They shaped our language, our laws, our literature, they burned their brand so deeply on our history, that, as long as the white man's race endures, the West will always be to us, the land of the cavaliers.

THE SIX-GUN JUDAS

by
JOHN CODY

How Many Pieces Of Silver Jim Murphy Got For Selling Out The Sam Bass Gang To The Law Is Unknown Today, But He Was Destined To Be Paid In Full In Another Way . . . .

Sam Bass had four companions,
Four bold and daring lads,
Jim Murphy, Jackson Barnes,
Joel Collins and "Old Dad."

Four bolder, reckless cowboys,
The Wild West never knew;
They whipped the Texas Rangers
And chased the boys in blue.

Jim Murphy was arrested,
And then released on bail.
He jumped his bond at Tyler
And hit the Terrell trail.

But Major Jones had posted Jim,
And it was all a stall—
It was a plan to capture Sam
Before the coming fall.

Jim Murphy borrowed Sam's good money
And did not want to pay;
So he set out to beat the game
By giving Sam away.

He sold poor Sam and also Barnes,
And left their friends to mourn.
Jim Murphy will a roasting get
When Gabriel toots his horn.

In the neighborhood of a half century ago the complete version of that old Sam Bass song was heard around every hearth and beside every campfire on the ranges of Texas. Wherever cowboys gathered its mournful melody was sung to the accompaniment of a battered guitar, banjo or wheezy mouth-organ. Night riders quieted their herds of wild longhorns with it and coaxed from them their instinctive yearnings to stampede. It was, in its day, the most popular song on the frontier and no song handed down to the present generation extolling the virtues—or lack of them—of the old West contains so much more truth than poetry. For it narrates perfectly, without detail, of course, the story of a contemporary Judas, Jim Murphy, whose scornful deeds are almost parallel to those of his counterpart of Biblical times.

In consequence, Jim Murphy, who was one of the *Dorados* (favored ones) in the notorious Sam Bass Gang that made things

so hot in Texas in the late Seventies, has frequently been referred to as a "Six-Gun Judas." The sobriquet fits him to the proverbial T, for he was just that, having sold out his best friends for personal freedom and so many pieces of silver, the number of which is unknown today. But the amount is said to have been sufficient to make his heartless acts tempting. That part of it is of little consequence. The fact remains that he was to be paid in full in an entirely different way, a way which has its counterpart in present day gangland methods.

Just where and when Jim Murphy saw the first light of day was perhaps never known or the facts are so fogged by time that they go unrecorded today. So in order to associate him with Sam Bass and Company, we are forced to hark back a bit to Bass' entry into the field of crime.

As in the first verse of the complete song version of Sam Bass the outlaw was born in Indiana and at the age of seventeen he began to roam. He first came to Texas, a cowboy for to be, and a kinder-hearted fellow you hardly ever see. The date of his birth was July 21st, 1851. In Texas he went to work for Sheriff Everhart of Denton County and soon after his arrival he began dealing in race-horse stock. He got hold of one particular horse which he named "The Denton Mare" and matched her in scrub races.

It was the custom of the period for the boys to gather in Denton on Saturday afternoons for the purpose of racing their best horses, drinking their tonnage in hard liquor and otherwise get action for their money. Bass coined money on his mare and he became so interested in racing her that Everhart finally informed him to pay more attention to his job or get off the ranch.

Although he had worked for Everhart for a period of nine years he decided to break out for himself and be his own boss, the first step on his downward trail that was to lead him to Jim Murphy and disaster. He finally went broke and in 1877 hired out to one Joel Collins to help drive a trail herd from Uvalde, Texas, to Deadwood, Dakota. Other punchers on this drive were Jack Davis, Jim Berry, Bill Heffridge and "Dad" Underwood.

The drive, through Indian and outlaw infested territory, was completed in six months. Arriving at Deadwood, Collins sold the cattle, got drunk and sat in a roaring poker game. That game in a large way helped start Sam on the main trail to ruin. Card sharks promptly stripped the bunch clean and inasmuch as Collins had bought his cattle on credit before the drive, payment to be made when the herd was sold, they found themselves face to face with a tough proposition—Collins, particularly.

All were broke and could not remain in Deadwood without funds. Collins could not return to Texas to face his financial deficit. They got their heads together and decided that there was only one way out. That was to resort to six-gun methods to rehabilitate their fortunes.

Joel Collins was well-liked and admired by his men and when he proposed that they pull off a few stage holdups in the Black Hills, they all consented. Thereafter they staged several jobs, but the pecuniary gain was so small that they, fired with their success, went after bigger game. Thus was formed the Sam Bass gang into which Jim Murphy was soon to enlist.

In the fall of 1877 the road agents dropped down into Ogallala to rob a U.P. train at Big Springs, a short distance away. They were on hand when the train pulled in and detained it long enough to order the express car messenger to open the vaults. The messenger explained that the vault was equipped with a time lock and could not be opened until the end of the train's run. Thereupon, Collins clouted him with

a gun-butt and would have ventilated him effectively but for Sam Bass who interfered, with the assertion that he believed the messenger had voiced the truth.

But just as they were about to leave the car, Old Dad Underwood, endowed with a snooping complex, discovered three small strong boxes lying at one side of the vault. He promptly shot a lock and lifted the lid. The box contained $20,000 in gold coins. The other two were found to hold similar amounts, totalling some $60,000 in all of 1877 mintage.

Delighted, the gang then proceeded to collect $5,000 more from the frightened passengers. That done they calmly rode back to Ogallala, hid the loot and loafed around town for several days while officers and rangers scoured the country for them, in vain. After it was publicly announced that the robbers had gotten away, they dug up the loot, split and parted, each taking his share.

Collins and Heffridge departed with intentions of heading for San Antonio. Bass and Davis paired off for Denton while Underwood and Berry lined out for Mexico, Missouri, which was the latter's home.

Meanwhile official descriptions of the culprits were wired all over the country. By the time Collins reached Buffalo Station, Kansas, a railroad agent there had received his description. He entered into a conversation with Collins and Heffridge and was convinced that they were members of the Big Springs holdup gang. He promptly hastened to a nearby army camp.

Collins and his companion were quickly overtaken. They tried to bluff their way out of a bad situation. But the lieutenant in charge of the soldiers was not bluffing. He ordered them taken back to camp to be held for investigation. On the way Collins and his companion made a break in an effort to shoot their way clear. The nearest undertaker ended the earthly careers of the two embryo outlaws.

The same kind of fate followed the others, with the exception of Sam Bass himself and Old Dad Underwood. The latter vanished into thin air and his disappearance has been the bone of contention in the teeth of historians ever since. But we have been able to solve the mystery by fortunately tracing Underwood to Palms, California, where he died in peaceful seclusion in 1929. After leaving Bass he went straight to Illinois where, in Jacksonville, he feigned insanity in order to hide in the State Insane Asylum until he was certain that his trails were lost to all who were searching for him. After that, he related personally to this writer, he joined the Jesse James band and spent several years roaming the country with that hard-riding, straight-shooting gang of desperadoes.

But all that is another story. We are concerned only in Jim Murphy and his treachery.

Bass arrived in due time in Denton and was informed that the rangers were looking for him there. His companion, Davis, urged him to go to South America, but Sam, believing he could outwit the law, chose to take it with blazing guns. Davis is believed to have started for New Orleans, but ran afoul the rangers before he got out of Texas.

With a posse of rangers on his heels, Bass gathered unto himself a goodly number of new associates and formed a band under his own leadership. Among them were Jim Murphy, an acquaintance of his horse-racing days and who became first lieutenant of the gang, Arkansas Johnson, Bill Jackson, a cousin of Joel Collins, Piper Herndon and Frank Jackson. Their first holdup was at Eagle Rock, Texas, a short distance out of Dallas. This venture can hardly be regarded as a success, as it netted them only a paltry $3,000.

Immediately there were about 100 Texas Rangers on their trail, with Captain June Peake in the lead. The gang was

finally overtaken on Salt Creek in Wise County. In the fight that ensued, Johnson was killed and Herndon and Murphy captured.

Just prior to this bloody fight, incidentally, Bass had recruited Sebe Barnes to his side. Barnes escaped with Bass and Frank Jackson. In rapid order they held up four trains in northern Texas, but obtained nothing to recompense them for their trouble and the risks.

About that time, discouraged with his failures to obtain rich loot, Bass had about decided to flee into Mexico. Federal authorities began working on the jailed Jim Murphy. They promised him anything if he would assist them in capturing Sam Bass and Sebe Barnes. Murphy finally turned traitor and was summarily released on bond. But the whole scheme was laid in advance for him to jump his bond and high-tail it back under Bass' wing.

This he promptly did, with plenty of money in his jeans and a guilty conscience. He owed Sam Bass personally the cool sum of $5,000, a debt of honor, which he was reluctant to pay back. He could think of no other way to get out of that obligation than to sell his friend out, lock stock and barrel. He did that, also. A Six-Gun Judas, was Mr. Murphy and like the Judas of Biblical times, the money which he had received as the price of his treachery became as coals of fire burning his hands.

Together they began planning to rob a small town bank for the purpose of obtaining enough money to see them into Mexico. They chose a bank in Waco. Bass, Barnes, Murphy and Jackson proceeded to that town. But when they arrived and looked over the land they discovered that it offered little chance for escape after a robbery. They gave up the idea of ravaging Waco and laid plans to rob the bank at Round Rock, Williamson County.

On their way to Round Rock they paused at the village of Belton. While Bass and Sebe Barnes were in the general store making purchases, Murphy, having been watched too closely to attempt to communicate with the authorities, had just time enough to slip away to the telegraph office and send the following message off to Adjutant-General Jones:

"We are on our way to Round Rock to rob the bank. For God's sake be there to prevent it."

Murphy had no more than sent off that message before Bass and Barnes emerged from the store. But unsuspectingly they mounted their horses and were soon on their way to their doom.

Jones notified Privates Dick Ware, Chris Connor and George Harold of Company E, Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers, to hold themselves in readiness to proceed against the outlaws at Round Rock. He then ordered Corporal Vernon "Coke" Wilson to ride hard to San Saba, a hundred miles away, with a message to Lieutenant Reynolds, advising him of the situation.

Coke Wilson started just at nightfall. His horse was soft and fat and in no condition for such a gruelling ride. Yet he managed to bring the animal into Lampasas, sixty-five miles on his journey, at daybreak the next morning. He arrived in time to catch the San Saba stage, but it cost him his horse. The valiant animal, wind-broke, turned up its hoofs as the stage pulled out.

With Wilson off, Jones ordered Ware, Connor and Harold to proceed without delay to Round Rock and keep out of sight until he could reach there. Jones followed with Morris Moore, an ex-ranger, arriving soon after the others. He hunted up Deputy Sheriff Billy Grimes, who was the local officer at Round Rock, and informed him that Sam Bass and his gang were expected to arrive at any moment for the purpose of robbing the bank.

As soon as Corporal Wilson arrived at

San Saba and delivered his message to Reynolds, the latter promptly ordered First Sergeant Nevill, Second Sergeant McGee, Second Corporal James B. Gillett and Privates Anglin, Ligon, Derrick and Bannister of the rangers to proceed to Round Rock.

Wilson, having had no rest for thirty-six hours, was spent physically, yet he hated to be left behind. To accommodate him, Reynolds had hitched a spring wagon. Into this Wilson crawled and slept while the cavalcade racked swiftly to North Gabriel, sixty miles in the direction of Round Rock. They reached Round Rock at noon, July 19th, 1878. Making an obscure camp in the brakes of Brushy Creek, Reynolds slipped into town to report to his superior, Adjutant Jones.

Meanwhile, Bass, unaware that the Texas Rangers had converged on him from almost all sides, made up his mind to rob the bank on July 20th. On the evening of the 19th, the band elected to ride into town and look over the ground for the next day's work and to purchase some incidentals. Their main purpose, however, was to map out a safe getaway.

Murphy was on edge, fidgeting constantly, wondering if his message had been received. Knowing that if Jones had gotten it in time, the rangers would in all likelihood be lurking in town. Not wishing to share the danger of going into Round Rock with Bass and Barnes, he suggested that he ride to May's store and purchase some corn for their horses while the others looked over the bank. This appeared satisfactory to Bass, Barnes and Jackson. Leaving Murphy to do that task, they went on without him.

They racked into town and hitched their horses in an alley just behind the bank. Then they walked past that institution, carefully noting every detail of the building and its surroundings. Satisfied that they had learned enough of the lay to enable them to make good an escape, they sauntered up the main street to Coprel's store to buy some tobacco. As they entered the store, Deputy Grimes and Moore were standing on the board walk in front, talking quietly.

The officers looked the three outlaws over closely and Grimes whispered to Moore.

"I believe those men are carrying guns. I'll go and see."

"Better go easy," warned Moore. "Might be part o' the Bass outfit!"

"Naw!" grunted Grimes. "They don't look tough enough for that!"

Without fear he entered the store with Moore trailing. Grimes approached Bass himself, authoritatively.

"Reckon you got on a pistol, pardner," he said quietly, as a law had recently been passed against gun-toting. "Is that right?"

"You're damn right I got a pistol!" growled Bass, smelling trouble. "You want to see it, hombre?"

Before either Grimes or Moore could draw and make the arrest, the three outlaws began shooting. Grimes fell on the first volley. Moore, with a bullet through his lungs, tottered drunkenly into a corner. Grimes never knew what struck him, for Bass drilled him between the eyes.

Dick Ware, who had been in the barber shop a few doors away, heard the shooting and rushed into the street, encountering the outlaws as they emerged from the store. Seeing Ware approaching with drawn gun, the outlaws threw down on him with no formality and shattered the barber's pole within a foot of his body. But Ware never faltered. He came on shooting and fought them single-handed for several minutes until Jones appeared on the scene. But Jones was armed with only a small calibred double-action Colt's revolver. Nevertheless, he sprinkled lead on the outlaws as rapidly as his toy pop-gun could sprinkle it.

Connor and Harold, hearing the rapid exchange of shots, rushed up and got busy. The outlaws made a break for their horses. But by this time every man in town who could get hold of a gun, was in the fight against them.

While Six-Gun Judas Murphy peeked on through the window of May's store, the blood of his friends was being spilled on the main street of Round Rock. Barnes was killed either by Ware or by Jones. That point is indefinite. But Murphy saw him killed and shivered to the marrow, craven in his treachery.

By this time Bass was mortally wounded and could no longer defend himself or mount his horse when he reached it. Frank Jackson proved to be a positive hero in a bad cause, however. He held up the rangers by his return fire while he untied Sam's horse and, under a fusillade of shots, hoisted Bass into the saddle. Together they rode out of town with Bass swaying in his seat like a drunken man.

Despite the vigilance of the rangers they made a clean getaway, temporarily at least. Early the next morning, the date for the robbery of the bank, Sergeant Nevill and his men located them not far out of town, in the brakes near Brushy Creek. Bass was lying desperately wounded, with Jackson seated beside him, trying valiantly to save his life.

The moment the posse sighted them, Bass, realizing that his time had arrived to cash in his chips, called out begging the rangers not to shoot. When they came up to him he was urging Jackson to get away. But unlike the Six-Gun Judas, Mr. Murphy, he insisted on remaining beside his old friend and chief until he had only the barest chance of escaping arrest. Then almost under the sights of the rangers' guns he vaulted into his saddle and vanished in the brush.

Bass lingered on in great agony until Sunday, the 21st of July, his right kidney virtually torn to shreds by a slug, then passed away. He was buried in the old cemetery at Round Rock beside Sebe Barnes. His sister later erected a small monument at his head, bearing the following inscription:

SAM BASS
Born July 21, 1851
Died July 21, 1878
A brave man reposes in death here
Why was he not true?

And so Sam Bass, the victim of human trickery, became but a memory, dying on his 27th birthday. Frank Jackson, making good his escape, returned to Denton County. Somehow en route he learned the truth of Jim Murphy's treachery and swore to hunt him down and kill him. He took up Murphy's trail which ranged erratically far and wide, for the Six-Gun Judas had heard of that threat, and kept moving one jump ahead of death. His conscience kept him awake at night. He never slept and he became a nervous wreck through fear.

Then one day he blew back into Denton, gaunt, sick and—afraid. Frank Jackson was still on his trail and it was hot now. Murphy learned through a friend that he was bearing down on him. Then something snapped inside of Murphy's conscience and fear-stricken brain. On a shelf in the shack where he cringed was a bottle labelled "Strychnine," used generally on the ranges to poison wolves and coyotes. In a fit of fear he snatched it up and swallowed its contents.

News traveled fast in those days despite the sad lack of modern facilities and Jackson soon learned of Murphy's death. Satisfied, he fled into Mexico where he married a very charming *señorita*. They have reared a large family. Now, at the age of 77 or so, he holds fond hopes of being pardoned by the United States government that he might spend the balance of his numbered days on native soil.

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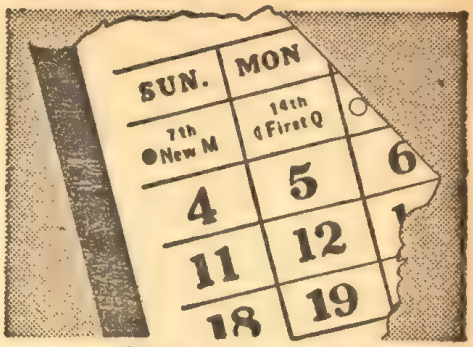

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QUEER AND HOT

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

Author of
"Let's Steal a Ship," "Rich Man's Party," and Other Yarns of the Caribbean

SKIPPER DAN CREDE looked across the breakfast table in the owner's cabin to see how Aylshire was taking this yarn of the dead rum lord's money buried for five years now on South Moon Reef. The Major's pink round face had been a perfect blank pan as young Joe Neal rehearsed what his Uncle John Neal had whispered to him on the last night of his life in Mobile.

"Captain Dan," grinned Owner Joe, "I see that you two guys have heard this before. Just a piece of bunk peddled about among the old rummies at Belize or Kingston—to you. But Uncle John told me."

"And who else did old John tell—as he raved?" said Dan Crede.

"That lawyer—Bascom. And I think Bascom was a gyp."

Dan did laugh then—quietly. The little Britisher, Aylshire, was mixing his first gin-tonic to start the day with. The *Itara's* cabin was a glint of white and gilt from the sun in the ports. Above and below the schooner had been refound with everything that money could do to make her seem a millionaire's toy. Which she

Inheriting the Fortune of a Rum-runner Brings Some Interesting Contacts—to Say the Least

wasn't. Or was young Joe worth that much? Joe Neal had been in college when Old John shoved off, leaving him the loose ends of a fortune which he'd been slowly discovering was a good deal of a mess. Joe knew now that his inheritance was a mess. This old Out Island gossip, for instance, of dead men left on South Moon Reef. Joe didn't get Dan Crede's interest till he mentioned a certain name.

"That lawyer—Bascom," pursued Joe—"went straight to one of Uncle John's old rum skippers with this hint about lost money. A fella named Lewis, who had a ship in the trade called the *Cormorant*——"

The little Major stuttered over his gin-tonic. "Oh, I say! M' lad, you don't mean it?"

Joe looked quickly from one older man to the other. Captain Dan's gray eyes had hardened. But he answered quietly.

"That'll be Spendy Lewis. A wolf, Joe, but trapped—Spendy was doing fifteen years for manslaughter in Texas when your Uncle John died. I wasn't in the States then."

"I know. But listen, this crook lawyer lammed out for Texas right after that. And a year later they got a parole through, and this mobster is out. Does that all tie up? I been bothering you, Captain Dan, to look into South Moon and you gave me the laugh. Now——"

"I'm still laughing, Joe. I can't imagine that Scotch uncle of yours plantin' a hundred thousand dollars or so in the sand and forgettin' it. It doesn't make sense."

"Listen," grumbled young Joe. "He lost three ships that year. The G-Men were nosin' into his income taxes. The old boy was sick, and trying to quit his racket, but he couldn't."

"No," grunted Crede, "that's the hell of it. He wanted to retire to a Scotch estate, shoot grouse and found a string of libraries and orphanages, and things like that. And lucky for you, Old John kicked off with a busted appendix before he could reform himself."

"Lucky?" Young Joe looked about his cabin. "Lucky as dirt! The only square shooters I've met since I started to untangle this inheritance are you and the Major here. You're the only ones who've told me the truth—the inside stuff. Like the sixteen dead hijackers that Uncle John left on South Moon one time—bloody stuff like that."

"Young fella—m' lad," said the Major. "Allow me to change the subject. A bit of gin-tonic, eh? Fever, you know. Poor laddie—down to your last half million, and a yacht on your hands—quite."

"Well," retorted young Neal, "Captain Crede says that Uncle John built this schooner to run or take it. Till Dan showed me I didn't know she had mounts for two quick-firin' guns. She was Uncle John's private yacht. Never used for liquor—so why the six-pound quick-firers?"

"Insurance," smiled Dan Crede. "That's why your Uncle John lived long enough to die with appendicitis. John had to watch his own mobs now and then, you understand."

"Yes," said young Joe. "Like this Spendy Lewis, and the black ketch *Cormorant* that was in Uncle John's rum fleet, eh? Say, Dan—what's on your mind? Was I talking out of turn?"

CAPTAIN CREDE laughed again. He usually was reserved with the owner. "Well, plans are changed, we're turning off the Panama run to South Moon Reef. It was just your mentioning that Spendy Lewis was on the loose again, Joe. Not that I believe your Uncle ever buried cash money on South Moon. He lost his *Sea Belle* there in a hurricane, sure, but leaving money—no. But we'll look in."

Owner Joe waved a monogrammed napkin, Irish linen, imported. The Major waved his tonic. Joe yelled, "Dan, you're the master!"

Captain Crede gave a curt jerk to the gilt-braided cap which Owner Joe had insisted upon for Panama, and went above. Aylshire busied himself with another tonic.

Even in mid-Caribbean there might be fever. The Major had waved breakfast aside. His came from a decanter.

"Sit down, m' lad. Dan will handle your black boys for'ard. The Moon Reefs are a bit thick navigatin'. I saw them once with Dan. Not a tree, nor livin' water. An old stone tower on South Moon—it seems that the King o' Spain's plate ships had an anchorage there some four hundred years ago. Dodged in when the pirates ganged up on them a bit strong. However, the channels have all changed since then. The jolly hurricanes have made charts worthless—except to Dan."

"The skipper seems to know that spot," said Joe Neal.

The Major sighed. "I fear so. I'd not ask him why. Captain Crede fetched cargoes from Glasgow to Belize when your Uncle John was topside in the trade. Yes, he'd know the Moon Reefs. The canny old Scot used to have his sailin' masters meet there where none of your jolly Federal men could come within hull-down distance without bein' noticed. A bit off the ship lanes, and uncharted channels. A master learned the way in to South Moon by losin' his first ship or so. Dan Crede did his—and your Uncle John wrote two hundred thousand dollars off his books. Wild days, Joey, m' lad."

Young Joe sighed in turn. He had inherited something besides a schooner, a Long Island house, a mess of stocks, bonds and litigation. The leads of Uncle John's fortune ran straight down to sinister affairs where the best he got was a shrug and silence.

So young Joe had learned not to question his sailing master, nor this hard-drinking little Briton, his best friend. Captain Dan had got the *Itara* freed from Colony libels and worse, and young Joe was grateful to both these men for more; he knew they liked him.

He followed Aylshire to the awninged after-deck. The schooner was lifting sweetly to as fair a sea as a man could wish. Porpoises thrust gaily ahead of the bow, pacing the thrust of the hundred-and forty-power Diesels. The Jamaica steward tinkled silver and glass in the galley passage. The black steersman from Grand Cayman grinned down from the tiny bridge. Dan Crede stood behind the weather cloth directing Cropsey after brief studies of the bottom.

JOE saw it now and then. White sand rising like a veil, and then dimming to absolute blue. Forward a lookout signaled the master, now and then. At last Dan put his hand to the telegraph; the schooner slacked, swung to starboard, drifted beyond a bar.

"Close as that!" gasped Neal. "The Moons are near by, eh?"

"Oh, no! Ye'll see a day of this, slippin' over a washboard from this side. We could fetch South Moon with fair deep water from the other way, but Dan's not makin' round the shoals. He'll have reasons, I fancy."

"One rotten spot if the sea came up," said Joe.

"Quite. In fact, we'd never get through. However, Dan——"

Joe Neal laughed. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not asking Dan."

"Don't," grinned the Major. "We're all pally as it stands."

They had a slow day of it. The sea was a washboard—white ripples and blue deeps. Sometimes an easy surf line, and once a clean bar showed, miles and miles of reef licked to a dazzle of sand. Certainly no entirely honest pilot would ever have crossed the Moon shoals from this side. There was that hinted yarn of a hijacking mob that did once, on Uncle John's tail, and never came back, neither ship nor men. Dan had said that much and shut up. He hadn't been there when the Scotchman fought a real sea battle.

Captain Crede took his lunch standing by his helmsman. Young Joe stayed off the bridge, even when the lead went out and down, and the schooner crept, barely making steerage way. Three times Ayl-

shire pointed out ships' timbers sticking from white sands, and one had a figure-head which no craft had borne for three hundred years.

"Dan's thought of getting divers over that spot," said the Major. "There might be a bit of harder metal than rumrunners' money."

"Listen," said young Joe. "Cut me in on that, will you? But I don't see how

a divin' outfit could stick here long enough to work."

"It couldn't," laughed the Major. "We thought of that also, young man. Any little sea would scatter your bones about with the rest of them. Well, Dan's pickin' up North Moon reef. Once around that there's a channel."

SUNSET was streaking the sea, red above a line that finally resolved itself to be dry sand dunes with the glistening shoals reaching on far to the west. Then the black Cayman Island lookout on the short foremast called sharply back to the helmsman.

Cropsey muttered to the master. "Might I use the glasses, sir?"

Crede had been watching beyond the shoals. "A turtle sloop, Cropsey. Out from Old Providence or Roncador Bank, likely. But is it the season for turtles? We'll haul down on that fella."

The pilot held the binoculars the other way, south. Yes, that sail was a turtler and not Spendy Lewis' black-hulled ketch, the old *Cormorant,* which Spendy had taken out of John Neal's rum fleet when the trade broke up. But Cropsey muttered something else. He pointed at the dry sand ridges. Beyond them mirrored water, beyond that a shoal again. The Islander handed the glass to the skipper.

"Lord love us, sir! Will you tell me what you see?"

Dan picked out a black dot on that narrow, sun-stricken spit of sand. A living man. A reeling man. Nothing in all the miles—not a tree, a weed, a coral outcrop Crede nodded.

"Yes. Port, Cropsey. Come in close as you can. I'll have a boat down. So a man marooned on the North Moon, eh? He's buried himself in the sand today out of that sun, much as he could. Well, that explains the turtler off the point watching. They put him there."

Cropsey signaled for half-speed, a quarter, watched the water change color, and then had the schooner losing headway skirting the sand reef. Dan passed Aylshire and Neal swiftly to the boat the black boys were swinging out. Neal had got to the rail staring.

"Skipper," he said, "how could a man be there?"

The motors had stopped. There was the silence of sunset calm. Then, upon this, came the howl of a maniac. Crede was down the short ladder to his boat without a word.

Owner Joe Neal shivered slightly. A wolf's howl, not a man's. But crossing the sand ridge was a tottering scarecrow. When Dan Crede had swung over the dinghy and crossed the wet shoals to meet him, the man began to claw at him, to scream and fight. Crede shoved him gently down and called to the black boys in the boat. The castaway collapsed in their arms as they carried him to it.

"Major," said Neal, "what's that? How about it?"

"Pleasant little custom," said the Major. "The chap's been put here a day or so, bareheaded in the sun, and not a blessed thing to cover his skin. Nasty trick, y' see, to make a chap come to time, eh?"

"But I don't get it!"

"Likely Dan will tell us later—if he can

find out. Dan'll be guessin'. That turtle craft off there, waiting. Dan, old chap——"

THE castaway had been shoved swiftly up to waiting hands by the rail. Dan jerked orders as he was carried below. There was a stir and mutter. Neal caught a glimpse of frothing, swollen lips, a man with closed eyes, trying to shriek and failing.

Dan turned to his friends when they followed to the passage below. "A touch of sun. Bad shape. A fella I remember from five years ago, Major. He had been with Old John in the wreck of the *Sea Belle*. Then you can guess this much. This man Pike—Dave Pike—was fetched down here. By Spendy Lewis, Major—and that means that the *Cormorant* is lyin' south of South Moon. Get it, Major?"

"A bit. This man's been put ashore on North Moon to think it over."

"Think what over?" retorted young Joe Neal savagely.

Dan Crede smiled bleakly. The Major chuckled, "Oh, likely how to raise sweet peas on the reef, m' boy! Well, he's put to bed and Dan will see to him. Now, Neal, how about a drink, you and I? The fever may still be about, there's no tellin'."

Neal looked at the man on the berth. Sunken eyes, bared teeth, matted hair, twitching fingers, as the black men rolled him in wet sheets, and fed him water drop by drop. Between locked jaws he seemed to be muttering. Crede listened, ear to the dry lips. Then stood up. "Kindly step aft, Major. You and Mr. Neal. The rest of you above. I think he'll talk in an hour."

They left him alone with the emaciated scarecrow. In the owner's cabin the Major chuckled. "Did you hear him 'Mister' us, lad? When Dan goes quarter-deck and gold braid, let him alone."

"What the hell is it about?" said young Joe.

"It's little I know. But there's the gong. They've got the hook up and pickin' out from North Moon. Lord love us, these channels are not taken that way, in the dark! Let's go above and call for ice cubes, man. Not that I'd encourage a young fella to the drink."

"No," grinned Joe. "You wouldn't, Major. Say, that crazy guy is yelling again. Came to, and the deck men are with him. Dan's at the wheel again. Major, what do you think?"

"Scotch," said the Major. "Press the button, laddie. Ask the man about a bit of dinner, will you? Dan likely'll not join us."

Neal shivered. Above the steady throb of the screws had come a maniacal howl. Dave Pike was being held down on the cold sheets.

THE schooner was beating in six fathoms of good water around the west end of North Moon reef. Lightless, steady, inexorable. They saw Dan Crede at the wheel. Cropsey stood in the wing, gasping. Forward the black crew had begun to murmur, then one yelled frightenedly. They were scattering wildly from the bow. Beyond in the starlight another hoarse shout arose. Neal saw the loom of a dirty sail. He saw a gray low hulk on his schooner's starboard bow for an instant.

Then he jumped up, grabbed a stanchion. There was a jarring crash. A lift of the hull, a swerve to starboard, and the *Itara* steadied on.

Joe Neal stared astern to a slow swirl of patched canvas and shattered timber, and the shouts of frightened men. He gasped:

"Major, Dan rammed that boat deliberately! The turtler!"

"Oh, yes! A bit of new paint off your bow, m' lad. But Dan knew the schooner could take it. I doubt if any of those turtle men are injured. They'll make the reef where they marooned this man Pike."

"Yes, but—— pursued young Joe, "what's the idea?"

"Just to insure that the turtle skipper will not sail to South Moon and inform Captain Lewis of the *Cormorant* that Cap-

tain Crede is hereabout. Y' see—" the Major chuckled —"that sun-baked lunatic, Pike, has told Dan something. Can it be that your Scotch uncle did really salt away twenty thousand pounds on the reef. Priceless idea!"

Young Joe cursed and walked forward. The black crew was muttering as Cropsey inspected the plates and reported to Dan Crede. No one paid attention to the owner. He walked aft to Aylshire at the drinks.

"Young fella, m' lad," remarked the Major, "I was upset, fearin' that the collision had disrupted your ice machine. But it hasn't. So press the button. The steward has recovered from his fright. Well, I had a word with Dan. He say that Pike was marooned by the turtler by orders of the mate of the *Cormorant*—a spigotty fella, named Morales. Absolute rotter, I'm thinkin'. Morales put a red hot iron to Pike's back, to make him say where your Uncle John cached his money on the reef. Spendy Lewis is at anchor off South Moon, waiting to hear. And in a playful mood Pike was put on North Moon with a five-gallon cask of water and a week's rations to think it over. Not till the sun got bad today did Pike discover that the water was salt and the food brine-soaked. The idea bein' that he'd best tell where your Uncle John hid his money that last day he was on South Moon with the sea up and havin' to abandon his *Sea Belle* on the outside coral. Pike is the only man livin' who knew just what happened."

"Pike—poor devil," muttered Joe Neal. "Damn them, Major! Damn them all!"

"The lad," commented the Major, "is gettin' blooded. Too bad your jolly little ship no longer is carryin' Uncle John's six-pounders below. Spendy Lewis may be nasty."

"You mean he's on South Moon now, searching for that money?"

"Likely waitin' for the turtle craft to fetch Pike back—if Pike's decided to talk. Ah, the ice—thank you, Steward."

NEAL went to hang over the rail. His schooner was making south swiftly now. There was a tongue of sea running through the vast sand traps of the Moon Reefs, and the *Itara* was crossing it. On the velvet dark of the South hung the Southern Cross, and the tide was a glimmer of stars. Fore or aft hardly a word was spoken till Crede ordered half-speed, then down to a slow beat that finally stopped altogether. When the schooner lost headway Neal knew she was in a cove where the easy swell off the pass had lessened.

Dan Crede went forward to supervise the loosening of the light anchor—foot by foot, eased down by cautious hands. Yet Neal saw no shore line through the star dusk. And no man spoke aloud.

Joe Neal mixed a drink in some discontent; his second of the day—he wondered how the Major could keep at it and be no more pickled than he appeared before breakfast. The Major had murmured that ancestry from five-bottle men likely aided a bit.

Then Dan Crede joined them in the cushioned chairs and ordered Bourbon straight. He glanced at the illuminated dial of his watch, then over at the purling tide where now and then a hunting shark glinted like a pale green shield.

"Well," said Aylshire, "who goes in the shore party? Now listen, Dan, don't say I'm not along! You've got seven niggers, and four are fightin' boys, but——"

"You're not along," said Dan Crede. "I take Pike."

"Pike! Dear chap, in the name of all Bedlam, why Pike? The man will howl!"

"No. He's sponged up some water and canned soup. Then I promised him he could stick a knife into Spendy Lewis' mate. That soothed Pike's mind. So Pike and I will scout South Moon first."

"If that bloody mob is ashore, Dan——"

"They'll hardly be. The *Cormorant*'ll be lyin' in good eight fathom beyond the bar that runs along outside of where the old Spanish tower sticks up. You saw it

once, Major, from the south. Some three miles from here. If Spendy's mob was there we'd see lights certainly. He's waiting for Pike to be fetched back. Pike knows."

"That money?" said Neal. "Pike knows where Uncle John put it?"

Dan Crede smiled. "As one lunatic to another—yes. Not that I believe it yet. It wasn't like Old John. We haven't the right answers."

"Uncle John told me—his last night living."

Dan smiled deeper. "Yes. But, young fella, I don't see it."

He went to see about the lowering of a small boat noiselessly held off from the plates by two black oarsmen. Then came Pike, a reeling shadow of a man, to go slowly down the ladder. Dan followed with an automatic rifle. He waved to his friends.

"Just in case—well, ease away, boys. Major, if anything should go haywire, that pilot from Grand Cayman can take Neal's schooner out."

"Oh, quite! But——"

"But!" hissed Joe Neal. "As if we'd leave you! Dan Crede, if anything goes wrong we'll all be there! Don't 'Mister' me any more!"

They heard Crede's faint laugh in the dark as the boat fell astern.

Owner Joe fell back on the cushions. He feverishly demanded a drink now. He wouldn't stand for this—he would do something. The little Briton chuckled.

"In a pinch we will, of course, Neal. You've a machine gun and a stand of rifles below. So however Captain Crede might object, we'll have a boat down and follow if we have reasonable doubts later. Meantime——"

"I'll try Dan's Bourbon, this time," grunted Neal morosely.

"It's treason to your Uncle John's memory, but very well. Boy!"

"Listen," said Joe savagely, "isn't there any law down here?"

"Oh, yes! British, Yank—or Nicaraguan—but the old rum skippers never knew it to arrive in time. The Moon reefs are a bit vague—and after all, what was a flag to your Uncle John? He had a dozen handy."

"Damn Uncle John," said Neal. "I was a sophomore at Princeton before I ever dreamed how he made his stake. It wasn't so pleasant."

"Damn no man who leaves you three millions." The Major chuckled. "Or was it? Laddie, you're ungrateful. Dan and I are hunting down the loose ends for you. Right?"

"You're a couple of grand eggs. But—listen? Was that the lunatic, Pike, howling?"

"The sea birds," said the Major, sucking his pipe. "No, Pike's remembering what Dan promised about the *Cormorant's* mate. It seems the mate did a few things, rather frightful to Pike before they marooned him. Pike will mind Dan's orders now."

OWNER JOE relapsed to uneasy silence. He wasn't a hand for drink and three made his hair tickle. He stared at stars and brimming tide. He'd have given that hundred thousand and another to have had Dan Crede back here on the after-deck. Dan with his quick hard smile, and quicker eyes. Dan, whose word all men believed. If Dan promised Pike the life of the man who had tortured him, Dan would stand by with a smile and watch Pike put a knife to him. Neal got it. The Law didn't reach into the forty-mile spread of white death for a decent ship about the Moon Reefs. A little sea up, and you never left them.

Dan Crede had skippered rum cargoes to Old John's rendezvous and gone out again. The rest was Old John's. Young Joe could guess. That crack about sixteen hijackers gunned on the beach, their vessel towed out to deep sea and sunk. Young Joe didn't relish it—he took another drink. Uncle John must have been a hard case—but he left three millions more or less.

"Oh, hell!" Young Joe got up, and pulled the starched whites from his long legs. "Major, I'm puttin' a boat down. Damn Dan Crede!"

"I was wonderin' if you would," chuckled the Major. "With the master away, you're in command. Unless he told the pilot to knock your ears flat. If Dan did, Cropsey will."

The man from Grand Cayman grumbled, but courteously as a West Indian would. They took two rifles and one black boy for the oars. The stern boat was not much more than a fishing skiff. So, with Neal pulling one oar, they made the beach a mile down with the tide.

"I hope," grinned the Major, "you know where you're goin'?"

"How the hell would I? Following Dan Crede."

"Hell, then, is the idea. A mile on westward, and then over the sand ridge, there's a stone tower and a wall. Bit of a ruin—

Spanish or buccaneer, no one knows. Perhaps a light for the King's plate ships up from Panama in the old days, and then forgotten for a century or so till the rummies discovered it. No tellin'."

"If," said Joe Neal, "those buccaneers could beat Uncle John's time, they were goin' some."

"Good!" laughed the Major. "Now, you're understandin' a bit—what?"

Neal swung up his rifle and strode to the sand ridge. The Major hefted his with disgust and followed. It was more to the point that on his hip he carried Neal's silver flask—Scotch. The Jamaica boy in the boat protested scaredly at being left alone. He'd heard tales—the Obeah doctors back in Ocho Rios had whispered tales of the Moon Reefs.

THE sand ridge was not twenty feet at its highest. It curved southwesterly, and they kept to the dry dunes in a wearisome trudge. Half an hour of this and Aylshire tapped his companion's arm.

"There, where the point ends—see it?"

A low, squat tower at the wet tide line. A broken wall running back to where it was almost buried in dry sand. The Major sat down cross-legged and peered at the glimmer of water beyond the tower.

Quiet as death, the long south curve of beach. Half a mile out was the coral that barred ships from coming in to the point—unless the pilots knew a certain twisting sixty-foot pass far to the east.

"Spendy wouldn't come in," grunted the Major. "No sense. The *Cormorant* is outside the coral, Joe. If daylight caught us here he'd see everything—clear back to where the *Itara* is lyin'. So Dan Crede guessed it right. Spendy needs Pike for the shore search."

"Well, then—what?"

"Lie here doggo. Let Dan and Pike prowl that ruin. If Dan knew we were here he'd bless us with language that your Uncle John would appreciate. Y' see, Joe, m' lad, I'd be no good on a retreat. Bit short in the legs and the wind. Then I'm opposed to violence."

"Yeah, man! I've got legs three inches beyond normal for you. Say, it's funny how quiet that fort is. Are Dan and Pike diggin' sand?"

The Major tilted his flask. Joe shook his head. "I like your guts, Major. What'd you do in a scrap?"

"I really don't know. Dan sees to that. The odd thing is that I've been in a number of them. Really, no end—and here I am."

Joe Neal eyed the little man closely. Well, after all, if Dan Crede tied to a guy he must have something. A fat little guy

who came along, knowing he couldn't run. Joe sighed contentedly. So they waited, talking in whispers as to whether Dan Crede and Pike were really in that ruin digging up rumrunners' money.

It might have been an hour before the faintest thing stirred the silence of sea and sand. Then the slightest creak, a rasp of wood upon wood. The Major turned, staring up the shore beyond the low tower.

"Oars, Neal. Coming around the coral point. From Spendy Lewis' black ketch, Joe. Now, where's Dan and his balmy lunatic?"

Joe Neal crouched around, the heavy rifle pointed. "What say? Let 'em have it?"

"Oh, my dear fella—no! Dan would be frantic. Not cricket! Wait!" The Major put a firm hand to Neal's gun. "We don't know who they are."

A late distorted moon had lifted above the Caribbean. Light glimmered faintly along miles of tidal reaches among the shoals. That tide was now slipping along the broken wall at the end of which was the twenty-foot tower. Likely enough a lighthouse built of ballast rock from Spain when the rich plate ships followed a course, long since forgotten, close to the Moon Reefs. Or else, as Crede said, a meeting place for the pirates who drove the Spanish captains from these waters. A low wall, the shore end buried in sand drifts, the other end buttressed by an empty tower —this was all Neal could see.

Aylshire listened to the unseen oars. "Spendy's men waited for a tide through the coral," he said. "Now Dan would know that also. Neal, m' lad, Dan waited for them then. Dan and Pike have had a good hour here to scout whatever nonsense Pike has blabbed about, and that must be finished. But Dan waited, and no bloody sense to it."

"Pike," grunted Neal—"to settle scores for Pike. Did you see Pike's back? The mate had traced a hot iron up and down before they set him on North Reef to dry out in the sun. Dan promised Pike——"

The Major shifted his rifle, stared at the tower. Beyond it, skirting the beach, was a ship's boat. A bow man was standing up among a dozen others.

THEN, at a low command, four of these slid over side. The boat was beached not forty yards from the broken wall. The group stood conferring. Back on the sand ridge, another forty yards, Aylshire and Neal could look down from a slight elevation, over the low wall.

"I see Dan Crede," the Major whispered. "That's it—he could have cut out safely before they came, and didn't? I call your mind to that, Neal—your sailin' master has brought on a battle which is no affair of his really."

"Pike—" muttered Neal. "I understand. Damn the hundred thousand—it's riddin' the world of a rat or two—now!"

He glared heatedly at Aylshire. It was amazing to find that this little pink man who detested all exertion was looking over his automatic rifle with dry coolness and confident humor. The Major watched the slow approach of the *Cormorant's* men to the silent tower.

Dan Crede might handle this parley, but Dan would also be surprised to discover two guns on the sand ridge at his back. Two friendly guns if the talk with Spendy Lewis went wrong. The Major was tickled to death at what both parties down there would discover. He shoved a foot to Neal's leg as the two looked along their sights on the sand dune. "Young fella, m' lad—I trust you don't mind takin' orders from an older man, now? I've seen a bit more than you, eh what?"

"Yeah," grunted Joe Neal, "except Crede doesn't get hurt——"

"That's entirely his affair. Well, don't fire till I do. We won't unless needs be. Hold up—there's Dan Crede on the wall!"

Dan's head and shoulder showed, an arm upthrust as he spoke.

"All right, Spendy! Far enough. Stop your mob at the tide line."

Ten men halted in dumb surprise. Three had stayed at the boat.

The lean, shambling skipper of the *Cormorant* led the mob. Lewis snarled but coolly. He was a leader, after all, not one to be confused.

"Yeah, I see—Crede. Dan Crede's voice. Well, I might have known. Heard you was in Mobile last month, Dan—and had a schooner again. All right, Dan, let's talk this over."

"Your mate—Morales? Is that him—the big one to the right?"

"Morales?" Spendy's harsh voice showed surprise. "Yeah—sure."

"Stand aside, Morales," grunted Dan. "The gun's on you. All of you, Spendy. Well, speak up, Lewis."

The master of the *Cormorant* glanced along his group of men. Seven were armed. The rest had ropes and shovels, picks and handbars. Lewis turned to face the wall. He could see Dan's head and the automatic resting on the wall. No more. But Spendy and his gang would never suppose that Dan Crede was alone, save for Pike crouching feebly at the angle of the wall. No, Spendy was too wise. He believed that a dozen guns would pour death from the ruins upon his mob unless he talked fair. And Spendy could. He suddenly laughed harshly, stepped close to Crede, dropped his gun to the sand.

"Yeah, Dan. Well, we meet again, do we? You came for the loot Old John left behind when the *Sea Queen* was sinkin' under him? Yeah, I reckon you'd find out from that cub, Joe. Yeah, you would."

Dan watched the others steadily as he talked. "Right enough, Spendy. You learned it from a crook lawyer in a Texas pen, and I learned it in Mobile. Here it is, Spendy."

Spendy shouted incredulously. "You know where? How come? We scouted that junk heap in and out yesterday. We come now to give another look. There was a fella could tell the spot if he would ——"

The Venezuelan mate, Morales, grunted viciously. "Pike, señor—it will be the man, Pike——"

Dan shoved his foot to Pike's cooked shoulder to still him. Pike whined like a dog, but so low no one heard. Dan watched Morales.

BACK on the sand dunes the little Major kept his gun sights on Morales. Instinct, the Major would have said; he insisted that his years of service in India had got him so that he could smell cobra. And suddenly from the other wing of the group came a stir.

Some man shot on a big flashlight, full upon Dan Crede's head over the wall. There was a move, a mutter. If a gun came up it halted.

For Dan Crede had fired. The dazzle in his eyes, he fired straight at the flash. The man who had held it was a heap in the sand, the flashlight stirring in his convulsed fingers.

"All right, Spendy. You pick up that light. You know me and you won't do foolish things. Pick up the flash, Spendy."

Spendy picked it up and cursed the writhing man behind him. Spendy cursed cheerfully. "Yeah, guy, you got what was comin'. Dan, can we move this way to the boat? He's bleedin' bad."

"No," said Dan, "you can't. Say, Spendy, two of your men have lammed. Down the beach there—get them back!"

Spendy threw up his hands. "I can't. The damned rats——"

Two men were lost in the starlight. They would come around behind the wall—behind Dan Crede's back. But Aylshire squirmed about that way. He chuckled. Dan wouldn't know his back was guarded.

"Well," grunted Spendy, "what can I do? I'm not a man to run or squawk, but I don't battle a stone fort either. Name what you want, Dan. Tell your mob to come out. All we want is to get back to the *Cormorant*, understand?"

"Yeah," said Dan. He glanced swiftly behind to the dunes. Two of the mob were coming about behind them, sure. It

was bad. He had to force this thing quick. A gun from the dunes would get him and he wouldn't know it. Spendy knew. Spendy was playing for time now. Spendy would kid and grin. When they got Dan the rest of the black crew would walk out from the tower.

"Sure," said Dan subduedly, "you want to get back to the ketch. All right, Spendy. Take old John Neal's money along with you."

"Yeah?" Spendy glanced around surprised. "No kiddin'——"

"There—" grunted Dan, "that hole in the sand. Not in this junk pile—four yards from the corner where the wall is broken down. Turn your light that way, Spendy."

"Oh, hell!" sneered Spendy. "Listen, Dan—why waste our time?"

But he shot the powerful flash upon the brown sand just at a heaped mound by the broken wall corner. There were some loose flat stones that had been dragged from a hole in the dry sand, and upon one of these flat stones was a heap of gray bundles. The light was so powerful that even Neal and Aylshire could see them. Banknotes that had been water-soaked and dried, and soaked and dried—but here they were, tied in faded red string.

Spendy Lewis was gasping behind the flashlight. Dan's gun held on the silent men behind him. The black boys muttered, the white mobsters rasped bewildered words to one another.

"You see, Spendy. John Neal's cache—hot money, Spendy. Take it away."

"What the hell?" yelled Spendy. "Morales, look at the stuff!"

"Morales?" said Dan, and laughed. "Say, you—Morales! Go pick it up, Morales! You get a cut, don't you?"

"Por Dios!" gasped the Venezuelan. "Is it possible? Then Pike—where is the man Pike?"

"Get the swag, Morales—for your boss," said Dan Crede.

Morales walked into the beam of the flashlight. He bent over the money packets on the stone, muttering astonishment. And Dan Crede kicked the trembling man at his feet. "Go, Pike!"

SPENDY LEWIS was staring along his flashlight beam when a gray shadow lurched through the broken spot in the wall.

Pike came with a feeble rush, but Morales never saw him. Pike's knife went home under the other man's arm as he lifted the money.

Pike stood up yelling crazily in the flashlight. Dan shouted at him. "All right, Pike. Come back here. Hey, Spendy, Morales got his cut, didn't he? The rest is yours—take it away!"

No man understood. Back on the sand dune young Joe Neal had got to his feet staring. The Major muttered in bewilderment. Down on the beach Spendy's men drew together looking at Morales' twitching body. Lewis turned his flashlight away. Then snarled.

"Pike? Say, what is this? Pike knifed Morales?"

"Hot money," said Dan. "Go look it over. I've nothing much against you, myself. There's a message also from Old John Neal. You can read it, maybe—even after five years in the sand."

Lewis stumbled forward, suspiciously watching that hole in the wall from which death had flashed to his mate. There was a yellow paper under the dried money packets. Spendy Lewis held his light close. His lean hard jaw worked as he studied faded writing.

Then he stood up and backed away. "Yeah, boy!" he muttered. "The damned Scotchman—I might have knowed!"

"You might," said Dan. "Any man who knew John would know! Get back to your ship, Spendy. Take that dead rat and the wounded one with you. I don't want any mess left on South Moon, understand?"

Lewis stood ankle deep in the coming tide. "Say, Crede—where's your mob?

This is something I don't get—how about it?"

"Get goin'," said Dan. "Hear me?"

LEWIS snarled to his men. They lifted Morales, dragged him to the boat after the other man. Pike was moaning crazily again behind the wall at Dan's feet. Lewis backed to the boat, leaving his flash behind. And then on the silence, against the dark of the dunes, came the spatter of gunfire. One—two—rising to a clattering chorus.

It sounded like a fight. It sure was a gun fight; but above the yelling and the shots came a rush of feet in the dry sand. The two men of Spendy's crew reached the beach a hundred yards behind where the others stood.

"What in hell?" muttered Crede. "That was the Major's whiskey voice! What in——"

He looked to the dim moonlit dunes shoreward. He recognized them now—

Aylshire dragging a heavy rifle, and young Owner Joe with his at port—charging ahead. Then Dan's eyes shifted to the staring mob on the beach. He raised his voice harshly.

"I told you once, Spendy—get goin'. My mob—call it a mob—is excited. You might get hurt—my mob isn't under such control as yours is. Make that boat, Spendy. I'll be seein' you somewhere again."

"You," shouted Spendy Lewis, "can go burn—get that?"

Dan Crede watched them closely as they retreated to the dim boat bobbing in the shoals. One dead, one bleeding fast. Pike stood up yelling again, waving a short stained knife.

"Oh, Dan," yelled Young Joe Neal, "you hurt? You need us?"

"How come?" said Dan. "I left you two with a bottle of Scotch on the afterdeck—what do you mean, Major?"

The Major followed Joe up on the four-foot wall. The Major was winded. It was a moment before he could speak. He fanned himself with Joe Neal's silver flask first.

"Captain Crede, we report for orders. Really do. I might add that those two chaps would have potted you in the back just now if they hadn't stumbled upon us waitin' for just that. Splendid!"

Crede jerked his gun toward the vanishing boat. "Yeah? I noticed they got clean off—except for a bit of scare."

"Skipper," gasped Joe Neal, "that's the first time in my life that I ever cracked down on a man with a gun!"

"Y' see, Skipper," explained Aylshire, "I saw you were handlin' Spendy down here quite well. And I'm opposed to violence. So when these two chaps came sneakin' along to get you in the back I told Neal to use his own judgment. If I wasn't a guest on his jolly little schooner I'd say he's a rotten shot. But at that, he turned 'em."

Dan Crede climbed over the wall with a soothing word to Pike who still shouted defiance to sea and sky.

"All right, Major. You and I might wish we were twenty-one and had yet to kill a man. But—well, Neal, there's Uncle John's money, and a message from him. Pike dug it up before Spendy got here. Pike helped Old John hide it. Pike alone. And I got all the answers."

Joe Neal came into the spot of light which Crede held—with Spendy's flash—upon the hole in the dry sand. Then upon the flat stones which had been a covering to the oilskin wrapper of the lost fortune. Young Joe stammered incredulously.

"What do you mean, Dan—answers?"

"Read it, and laugh," said Dan. "Spendy did. So did I."

Joe sat down and dragged the packets of banknotes to him. He studied long over the yellowed paper that had been buried with them. Then he looked up quietly.

"Dan Crede, can you believe such rot?"

"Knowin' Old John, I believe it all. So much that we'll have a bonfire, right here on the sands of South Moon. And a drink —got it along, Major?—drink to the hot and queer."

"Counterfeit money!" whispered young Joe Neal.

"Of course. Would Uncle John toss away anything else? This is stuff that he'd been stuck with many a time, dealin' with the shore men who took his liquor. An old, old trick, Joe. The best of the outside traders got it now and then. They never could tell on an all cash deal."

"But—but——" gasped Joe Neal, "what was Uncle John's idea?"

"Ask me another. The stuff was no good but he buried it, thinkin' maybe a pack of damn fools would sometime get in here and fight for it. Then when he came to die, likely enough delirium got him to believin' it was real. Anyhow, he seems to have given you that idea, and also to that mouthpiece who told the yarn to Spendy Lewis. That's all I know, and all Pike knows. Pike thought it was real. Spendy shanghaied Pike in Galveston and brought him down here to turn the heat on, so he'd tell the spot it was hidden in. Pike —poor devil! I don't think he'll live till we make Panama. Done in."

Neal watched Dan Crede touching a match to Uncle John's queer money. It made quite a little bonfire, but slow. Dan said there was no hundred grand anyhow. Dirty, disguised twenties, fifties, hundreds —there was no use in checking up. Uncle John wouldn't have left a dollar note that was good.

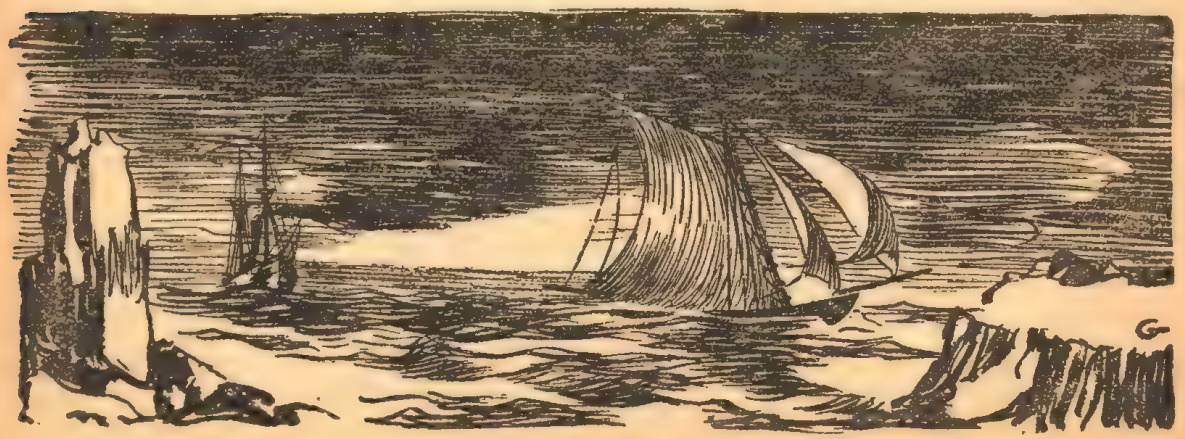
"No," said the Major, "trust John Neal for that. He sat in his cabin and tested every one—and cursed the rum trade no end. Old John would have his joke. Well, Laddie, m' buck, let's get back to your schooner and turn in. Quite a jolly little bonfire, eh, Dan?"

"Come away," said Dan. "I'll carry old Pike. He's gone limp."

"I'll lug the guns," said Joe. "Major, you carry the flask—God knows it's empty. But say—you two—I'm not satisfied yet. Somewhere—down the Leewards, or the West Caribbean, or maybe up in the Out Islands around Inagua, or somewhere—maybe in some safe deposit box in some unknown Colonial bank—Uncle John's got some of his rum money hidden. His books show it. You fellas game to go find it?"

"You got a ship," chuckled the Major, "and a skipper. Eh, Dan?"

"Let's go," said Dan Crede.



THE DEAF MAN

By
FRANK
RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Snatchers," "Chiseler," "The Last Spark," etc.

THE prettiest secretary in Hollywood turned to Moe Ganz and said, "A Mr. O'Grady who says he is chief of detectives wishes to speak to you on the telephone, Mr. Ganz." She disarmed his annoyance with a smile. "I simply couldn't head him off. It's something about Stan Dvorak. He says it is very important."

Moe Ganz experienced a chill at the thought of anything happening to Para-Art's leading character actor. "Tell me, darlin' is Stan on the lot this morning?" he inquired.

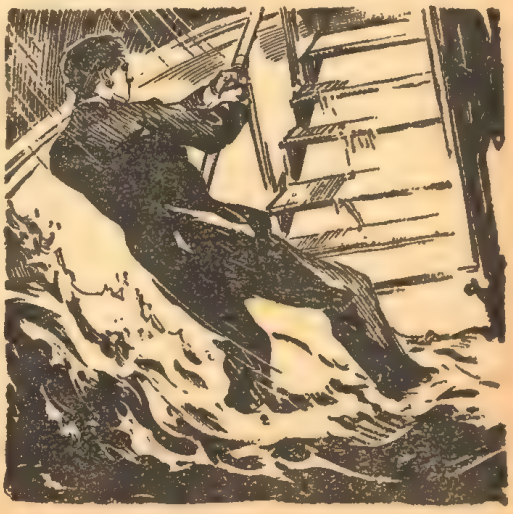
"He is," the girl replied.

"Then nothin' can have happened, or I'd have heard from the lot direct, and not from O'Grady," Moe reasoned aloud. He picked up the receiver and said, "Phooie to you, Mr. Chief O'Grady." Whereupon he banged down the receiver and picked up a script he was reading.

Moe read aloud:

"FADE IN:

A Deaf Man Figures on Everything Except Stan Dvorak's Amazing Skill at Crime Detection



Stan Dvorak, dressed as the Night Crawler, is dragging himself through a Chinatown gutter. Tourist ladies are staring at him; men throw coins into his ragged hat; Stan reclaims a cigar butt and . . ."

The telephone rang. "Para-Art. President Ganz's office. Oh yes, Chief of Detectives O'Grady."

The girl turned to Moe and lifted her brows inquiringly. "He's getting tough," she whispered, "I can tell by his voice. You had better answer."

Moe picked up the instrument and barked, "A couple of phooies for you, O'Grady. Always by you I get trouble. And with Stan it's even more trouble by you. Acting is a business, detectiffing ain't a business. Stan Dvorak's an actor and you should leave him alone."

"Now listen, Ganz," the detective growled, "I'm a patient man. I've tried for the last hour to get in touch with Stan Dvorak. No dice! Somebody always heads me off. I'm not asking to talk to him now. I'm asking that he be immediately notified that I want to speak with him. After that it's up to him. Again, no dice! So I get you on the wire and you give me a couple of phooies. Mix this in with your Kosher wine and see how it tastes. We've got eleven traffic tags against you personally and we're going to make an example of you, Ganz. Also a couple of phooies!"

THE receiver clicked in Moe's ear. He spluttered and picked up the script again. It read:

". . . Hatchet men slink down a gloomy alley. Shutters open and hastily close. Stan raises his head and a hatchet whistles from the darkness and . . . ."

Moe threw the script down on the desk. "Lousy!" he yelped. "No suspense! No excitement! Nothing happens!" He scowled at the telephone. "So they're going to make it an exemple of me."

"'Wealthy Motion Picture Producer Defies Police!'" the secretary said. "I can just see the headlines. 'Hollywood Barons Hold They're Above Law says Chief of Detectives O'Grady,'" the girl continued. "'Moe Ganz . . . !'"

"Darlin'!" Moe shrilled. "On my bended knees I esk, shut up! Can't you see you're breakin' my heart. It's just like as if it was already in the newspapers. As the poet says, 'A toining woim gathers no moss.'"

"And you are a worm that is going to turn?" the girl sweetly inquired.

"I don't know which way to toin," the producer moaned. "It's no good what this bum, O'Grady, wants of Dvorak. The dumb dick has got it a case he can't figure out, so he cries for my Stan. When Papa Moe says no, he gets tough."

"He seems to have the goods on you," the girl ventured. "You yourself told me to tear up the traffic slips."

Moe lifted his hands to the heavens. "I'm bein' tortured. Even now——" The moan of a distant police siren came through the open window. "I knew it! They're comin' for me, even now."

"Perhaps it is only a sergeant going home to lunch," the girl suggested. "It's almost noon. But really, you'd better do something. O'Grady has you on the spot."

MOE grabbed his hat and hurried onto the lot. He stumbled up the steps to Stage Seven, ignored the warning word, SILENCE, and barged onto the sound set. Boren Bilderback, the director turned, to wither the intruder with a blast. Instead he held up proceedings. "Good morning, Mr. Ganz," he said. Beautiful girls trilled good mornings; robust men growled them.

Moe ignored them. He went directly to a grotesque figure strapped to a board, which was held by two men. "Right away, Stan," he said, "you should do it something for Papa Moe."

"Sorry, Moe," Dvorak answered, "but I can't do anything for you right now. It's taken me two hours to get into this make-up, and I want to go through with the scene."

Moe glared. "I esk, is this a revolution, or what? Since when do you don't do what I say?"

"Is it an order?" Dvorak asked.

"Does it sound like I was tweetin' to the boids?" Moe demanded.

"One more shot," Bilderback pleaded.

"Just one more shot," Moe conceded.

It was a half hour later that Moe said, "Papa Moe is on the spot. That bum dick, O'Grady, hes it on me. He esks you should talk by the telephone. Better go see him, and fix it, them traffic slips."

"Okay," Dvorak agreed, "I'll do what I can for you. But I'm making no promises."

DVORAK hastened to his dressing room, picked up the nearest telephone and called the Bureau of Investigation. "Well, it worked," he said hurriedly. "There wasn't a chance of his letting me off. And yet there was no reason why I shouldn't take a few days. We've just about finished production on my latest picture. May be some retakes in a week or ten days. Where'd you say this murder was committed?"

"I'll pick you up at the studio gates in a half hour," O'Grady replied. "I'll fix those traffic slips, too."

"Fix most of them, but leave a couple for an ace in the hole," the actor advised.

Dvorak set about the business of removing his make-up. In a way he felt sheepish over the fast one he had pulled on his employer. He realized Moe's interest in his wellbeing was personal as well as commercial. And he was willing to admit an element of danger was involved when he assisted O'Grady to solve a tough case.

WHEN he emerged from Para-Art studio the character, Stan Dvorak was left behind. The bright California sunlight of song and story revealed an attractive young man of medium build. Socially he was known as a man-about-town with more time and money on his hands than was good for him. His name was John Stanley except to the precious few who knew his real identity.

The detective car rolled up to the entrance and Dvorak hopped in. "This is a tough one," O'Grady began immediately. "I'm dead sure I've got the murderer, but my hands are tied. I can't prove it. If I move in and make the arrest, then I'm liable to be sued for false imprisonment and a lot of other things a smooth lawyer can think up."

Within a few minutes the car stopped before an ornate apartment house. The roar of traffic and the hum of industry was muted. An air of exclusiveness hovered over the district.

"A murder in this district will cause a sensation," Dvorak observed.

A plain clothes man was on guard at the apartment house door and a second man

greeted the chief at the door of the apartment. "The fingerprint man was here again," he said, "but it doesn't appear the murderer left prints."

"A Colonel Jessup lived here," O'Grady explained. "The title was honorary, I believe. He was a man of modest means, kept to himself and had no visitors. Early this morning he was found lying on the davenport, dead. He had been struck by a blackjack. The place had been pretty thoroughly searched. Of course we don't know what is missing. There was nobody to tell us what the old man possessed."

IF NOTHING of value was found in the apartment, then it is reasonable to suppose something was taken," Dvorak argued. "Obviously a man who could afford to live in a place such as this, possessed articles of value—rings, perhaps; certainly a watch, silverware and the like."

"Exactly." O'Grady agreed. "Robbery might be the motive. Again, we can't overlook the family quarrel angle. That's important, but the devil of it is, we can't get any trace of Jessup's relatives."

"What does the doorman have to say?" Dvorak inquired.

"I'll read the report," O'Grady replied, unfolding a transcript. "'At four o'clock yesterday afternoon a deaf man appeared and asked to visit Colonel Jessup. He said he was expected. As the man was not a lip reader it was necessary for me to put my questions in writing. He responded verbally and I sent him up. I went off duty at six o'clock. He had not departed at that time unless by way of a rear basement window which was found forced this morning.'"

"What did the night doorman have to say?" Dvorak asked.

"There were several parties on last night," O'Grady answered. "Arrivals had to identify themselves, but he paid no attention to departures. Naturally a party in this place would be an orderly affair. The Deaf Man might have left, unobserved, with a departing group."

"Then, how about some thug forcing the window, robbing and murdering Jessup, then leaving by the window?" Dvorak suggested.

"I've been expecting that," O'Grady said. "You see, Stan, I'm suggesting no theories. If left alone, and not bothered with my deductions, you may get a different slant than I have. It may be the right slant. A burglar would force the window, enter, then depart. The dust shows whoever forced that window went out, then came back in."

"Clearly a trick on the murderer's part to suggest the robbery motive," Dvorak said. "Hmmmm! My guess is the Deaf Man turned the trick."

"Come into the next apartment and hear the occupant's story," O'Grady suggested. "It'll be short and sweet."

THE adjoining apartment was occupied by a sour-faced individual. "Mr. Holland, meet Mr. Stanley," O'Grady said.

Mr. Holland did not offer to shake hands, but stared at Dvorak with obvious disapproval. "I've heard of you," he snapped.

"Spendthrift; gallivanting around with picture women. When I was your age I worked."

"Tell Mr. Stanley what happened last night, please," O'Grady requested.

"You'd think I'd killed Jessup from the questions. I've told the same story a dozen times, but I can tell it again. About ten o'clock I heard angry voices. That surprised me. Mr. Jessup was a bibliophile and spent most of his time reading. Collected first editions. He yelled his head off. Couldn't make out what he said, but I heard this. 'I'll see you in hell first!' Then the visitor answered, 'Just keep this up, and you'll be there waiting for me!' Then he laughed and said, 'No need of quarreling!' After that I heard nothing!" He got up from his chair and plainly indicated the interview was over.

"That lets out the Deaf Man," O'Grady said as they returned to the Jessup apartment. "Obviously if he couldn't hear what was said he couldn't respond. If Jessup conveyed his thoughts with paper and pencil there would be no occasion for him to yell."

"Unless the Deaf Man was posing—laying the foundation for defense in case he was arrested for the murder. Where is he?" Dvorak asked.

"I suppose you have a bright idea of testing him out by shooting off a gun; suddenly yelling his name; warning him a wall is about to fall on his head and all that," O'Grady suggested. "Well, forget it. We've tried every known trick. None of

them work. Either he's deaf, or he's the smoothest actor I've ever encountered."

"Let's have a look at the remains and then—the Deaf Man," Dvorak suggested.

DVORAK applied his marvelous skill in reproducing a human face in his criminal investigations. Trained to note even minor structural details of a face or head, he was quick to observe points the average detective would overlook.

At the morgue he walked slowly about Jessup's head, studying it at every angle. His memory photographed it so that he could have made up to resemble Jessup had that been necessary. From the morgue they drove to a moderate priced hotel, and took the elevator to the tenth floor.

O'Grady led the way to a room. A sheet of paper tacked to the door read:

"Deaf! Enter without knocking!"

Dvorak said in a normal voice, "I'll get behind him, crack him one on the skull. As he comes to he may talk. There is a point where caution is low—when a man isn't completely conscious, yet speaks of events. He may spill something."

"I get the idea," O'Grady whispered. "You figure if he can hear that he'll give himself away by keeping his back close to the wall."

"Exactly!"

They entered and O'Grady wrote, "Mr. Manning, I want you to meet Detective Stanley. He wants to ask you some questions."

Manning shook hands and said, "Certainly. I realize the fact Jessup seldom had visitors makes my position difficult."

Dvorak studied Manning's head with the same intentness he had displayed in the examination of Jessup's. He walked slowly behind the man, but Manning did not even glance at him. Dvorak's expression plainly said, "Damned if I don't believe he's deaf."

HE SEATED himself and wrote. "Why did you call on Mr. Jessup?"

"I make my living picking up old editions and selling them. Mr. Jessup was a collector and I had a set I thought would interest him. We discussed it at length. Naturally we were handicapped by my deafness. He had to write out his queries," Manning explained. "I left sometime between six and seven, I should say."

Dvorak picked up the tab and wrote. "What is the relationship between yourself and Mr. Jessup?" He studied the man's face as he put the query.

Manning looked up, surprised and smiling. "Why, none," he answered. "I never

saw the man before. That is a funny question."

"I just thought I detected a family resemblance," Dvorak wrote back. "I guess that's all. Thanks."

"Mr. O'Grady," Manning said, "I would like your permission to leave the city. Under the circumstances it might look queer if I left as I had planned. I'll remain, naturally, if you wish to question me further, but I have clients in San Francisco and—you understand. If necessary I'll return. A situation of this nature is a handicap to an innocent party and—an expense."

"You can go any time," Dvorak said. Manning did not move, nor change expression until O'Grady wrote, "You can leave any time."

"Thank you," he said.

As the door closed behind the two, Dvorak said, "Just a minute, O'Grady, until I light a cigar." He struck a match and added, "That eliminates Manning. I guess this case has us licked."

They continued to the elevator where O'Grady scowled at the actor. "That last remark was for home consumption, eh?

You wanted Manning to hear it. And you still think he isn't deaf!"

"I not only believe he can hear as well as we can," Dvorak replied, "but I am positive Manning is Jessup's younger brother or nephew. There is a marked family resemblance if you study the skull structure of the two men."

"You're going to have a hell of a time proving it," O'Grady predicted. "Want us to hold him?"

"No, don't even shadow him," Dvorak answered. "Drive me back to the studio."

DVORAK went directly to the business office. "I want to talk to the smoothest salesman in the organization," he said.

"We've got a man here who could sell Moe Ganz a ham factory," the sales manager replied. He pressed a button and presently a well dressed young man of twenty-five appeared. He fairly oozed personality. He was introduced as Ted Bracken.

"There's a gentleman named Manning I'd like to see take an ocean voyage," Dvorak explained. "I happen to know he is going to San Francisco. I'd like to bet you a hundred dollars against ten that you can't sell him steamer transportation. I think you should know, he's deaf—or claims to be."

"I'll take that bet," Bracken replied, grinning. "This isn't going to be so easy though. Northbound steamers are liable to run into rough weather."

"I know it," Dvorak admitted.

When they were alone O'Grady growled, "What the hell are you up to, Stan? A deaf man who may be Jessup's nephew, has possibly murdered him and you try to trick him into going on a sea voyage. I don't get the connection at all."

"There's a very definite connection," Dvorak replied, "if my theory is sound."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Stand by for a radiogram providing Bracken sells Manning a ticket on a northbound steamer," the actor replied. "I'll send the message. You see, I'm going north on that steamer."

Within twelve hours Ted Bracken appeared and collected his bet. "Say, I've got writer's cramp selling that bird on the idea of fall sea travel," he grumbled. "He was all set to take a train. Here's one century note I earned."

"Thanks," Dvorak returned, "follow me and you'll wear diamonds, or—get your picture in the paper."

DVORAK finished up some work at the studio and escaped before Moe Ganz could ask questions. Three hours before the ship sailed he made up as a steward and was assigned to look after a number of rooms. Manning's room was included in this number. A half hour before sailing time, Manning appeared. He failed to recognize the steward, Dutton, as the John Stanley who interviewed him in company with O'Grady.

"Steward, I am stone deaf," was all he said. "Please write such questions as you may wish to ask."

Dvorak nodded, placed Manning's bags under the bunk, and withdrew. He returned with a dish of fruit shortly after the ship sailed.

"Do you get seasick, sir?" Dvorak wrote.

"I don't know, Dutton," Manning answered. "This is my first voyage. I have always been a little afraid of boats—just a hunch as you might say. A man with a smooth tongue, or perhaps I should say, pencil, persuaded me to try it once."

"I trust you will have a very pleasant voyage, sir," Dvorak wrote. Then he departed.

Later when Manning went down to the dining room the actor quietly entered his stateroom. He opened the bags and hastily searched their contents. Each article was returned to its original position and he was confident the man would never suspect his baggage had been tampered with. "Not a thing," he muttered. "The usual clothing; a book containing the addresses of

people interested in first editions; and some light reading matter. And yet, there is a marked likeness between Jessup and Manning."

He returned to his station below decks, and a passing steward observed, "We're in for a bit of a blow, Dutton."

"The harder the better," Dvorak replied. "I like it rough."

"It er . . . ah . . . does sometimes increase the tips," the other admitted. "As well as adding to the work."

DVORAK awakened to the creak of ship's timbers and the thunder of seas against a steel hull. Through a portlight he caught a flash of stars and black, tumbling clouds. He dressed and hurried to Manning's room. He entered and turned on the light.

The man, a greenish-gray in color lay sprawled on his bunk, a victim of seasickness. "I thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting along, sir," Dvorak said. "I've been seasick myself, sir."

There was no response to his observations. "I'm sick, Steward," Manning moaned. "Isn't there something you can do for me? Damn the hellhound who persuaded me into buying a steamer ticket."

"Seasickness is caused," Dvorak continued, "not by the tossing about of the stomach as so many believe. The pitching of the boat disturbs a nerve center in the inner ear, creating a nervous condition which upsets the stomach, sir." He paused.

There was no comment. Dvorak's eyes were hard and he looked squarely into Manning's face as he concluded, "And so for that reason deaf people are not seasick. I said, deaf people are not seasick," he repeated.

He saw fear come suddenly into Manning's eyes, then the man's calmness returned. "It's no use, Manning," Dvorak said, "I arranged this sea voyage to test your deafness after ordinary tests had failed. The jig's up." He sensed the man was breaking, and took a wild shot in the dark. "The baggage checks you mailed to yourself covering bags containing the loot are in O'Grady's possession by now. You might as well come clean."

Silence. But the fear in Manning's eyes increased.

"It happens, Manning, my business is to reproduce human characters for the screen. I study skull structures particularly. And I couldn't be mistaken in similar characteristics of your skull and Jessup's. My name is Stan Dvorak."

"Stan Dvorak!" Manning spoke for the first time. "I might have guessed it. No dick would be smart enough to go after a case that way. All right, I killed him. I couldn't see why my uncle should have a hundred thousand and not split it when I was starving to death selling books."

A SEA crashed over the ship and shook it from truck to keel. "Go on," Dvorak ordered.

"I figured the deaf rôle would clear me sure. A deaf man wouldn't respond to angry shouts. He wouldn't hear them. So the dicks would be looking for somebody with normal ears. I practiced for a year against sudden yells, pistol shots and all the tricks the dicks pull. I wore gloves and left no fingerprints. I figured on everything except your damned knowledge of seasickness and skulls," he snarled.

For a moment it looked as if Manning would leap from the bunk and attack Dvorak, then suddenly he settled back in utter defeat. "They'll find a hundred thousand in diamonds and securities," he said. "I checked them in baggage to San Francisco."

Dvorak picked up the telephone and called the radio shack. "Send this collect to O'Grady, please," he said. Then he dictated:

"O'Grady:

"Meet ship and take charge of prisoner at San Francisco. Tell Moe Ganz to get off his bended knees. I'll be on the job Monday mornnig.

"Stan Dvorak."

The Trouble Busters ~ by Harry F. Olmsted

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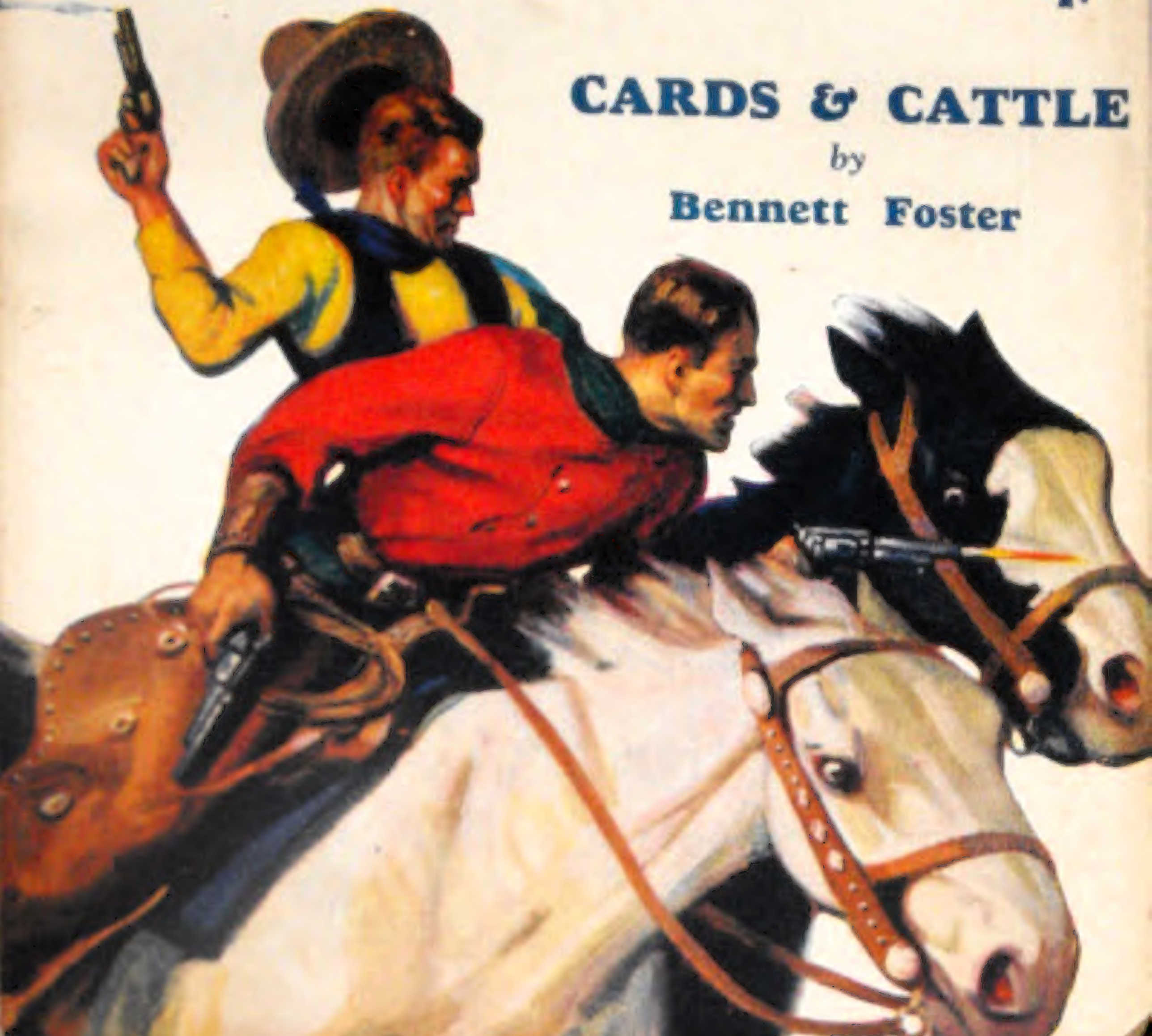

CARDS & CATTLE

by

Bennett Foster